PERSPECTIVES OF RURAL HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS REGARDING CAREER READINESS SKILLS

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Submitted to the faculty of the School of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy,

Indiana University

May 2020

Accepted by the School of Education Faculty, Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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Date of Defense
December 5, 2019

Acknowledgements

I want to express my gratitude and appreciation to the members of my dissertation committee for their guidance and support throughout this process. Dr. Mónica Byrne-Jiménez has guided me through this journey with encouragement and enthusiasm. Dr. Erwin shared her knowledge and leadership qualities with our cohort throughout the process. Dr. Fankhauser has provided guidance for me on a multitude of levels as she instructed my courses at Indiana University Southeast many moons ago. For her wisdom and guidance, I will forever be grateful. And, I wish to thank Dr. Gretchen Butera and Dr. Chad Lochmiller for joining my committee to provide expertise on career readiness and rural school perspectives.

I would also like to recognize the amazing and wonderful 2013 Ed.D. cohort. Without this special group of individuals, I would have never completed this process. Their words of encouragement and check-ins kept me focused on the finish line, and for that, I will be forever grateful. It is not every day that you can find an amazing and inspiring group of selfless professionals.

Mostly, I would like to express my gratitude to my amazing husband, Denis. His support throughout this educational journey has been more than I could have ever asked for. Finally, Kris, Jace, and Jessa, I hope I have been an inspiration for the three of you to persevere through challenging situations to achieve your dreams!

Regina Lanham

PERSPECTIVES OF RURAL HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS REGARDING CAREER READINESS SKILLS

Preparing students to enter a changing workforce is one of the most critical missions for K-12 educational institutions in the United States. As business and industry continue to evolve, so too must the skills obtained by high school students. In response to ever developing workplace expectations and updated federal education regulation, Indiana established new graduation mandates in the spring of 2017 that included the requirement that students demonstrate career readiness skills. This qualitative descriptive case study will provide baseline data from small rural schools in Indiana regarding teacher perceptions surrounding career readiness and classroom practices. Previous research recognizes the skills needed to be successful in the workplace and post-secondary education overlap, including mathematics, writing skills, and language comprehension skills. However, skills including self-discipline, time management, communication, and collaboration are valued by employers but rarely fostered or assessed in high school classrooms. This study explored rural high school teachers' perceptions as they incorporate career readiness skills into classroom practices along with the obstacles they face in the process. To address the research questions, the study included three phases: (1) semi-structured face-to-face interviews with nine teachers, responsible for implementing career readiness skills at the high school; and (2) one focus group of six teachers, who also participated in the semi-structured individual interviews, and (3) a review of artifacts and documents from multiple sources including building level and district college and career readiness documentation; to provide a shared perspective of the overall consensus of career readiness knowledge and building level embedment. Data from these three phases were combined and coded to identify significant themes among Hoosier high schools' career readiness practices.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

One of the most critical missions for K-12 educational institutions in the United States is to prepare students to enter the changing workforce. Contemporary commerce has become responsive to a host of factors, from an increase in globalization to technological advancements, and just as business and industry have evolved, so too must the skills obtained by high school students seeking to enter the workforce. The passage of the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) included measures to ensure all learners will be prepared to succeed in the 21st century (Estes & Kreamer, 2017). Under ESSA, states can set and execute a vision that "provides students with multiple, meaningful opportunities to engage in lessons that build awareness of career opportunities, provide real-world instruction, and lead to credentials with labor market value" (Education Strategy Group, 2017, p. 2). Accordingly, states and school districts have been working to align college and career readiness content standards and academic achievement standards with requirements recognized by employers and industry leaders (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2017).

Historically, career readiness has been the domain of Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses and instructors, but education leaders recognize career readiness skills should be implemented into the high school core curriculum on a broader scale (Estes & Kreamer, 2017). In Indiana, beginning with the class of 2023, students will have to demonstrate mastery of career readiness skills, including academic, technical, and professional skills by participating in a project-based learning, service learning, or work-based learning experience (IDOE, 2017). This new mandate increases the role teachers of traditional academic subjects have to play in regard to

career readiness. Research indicates that core academic classroom teachers' perspective of career education can have a strong influence on students' connections to their future careers (Akos, Charles, Orthner, and Cooley, 2011). Teachers undertake an important role in students' career development, making it critical that teachers better understand how they will contribute to the implementation of college and career readiness standards.

What do educators mean by the expression "career readiness and, what are career readiness skills?" According to Applied Systems Education System, a provider of career readiness curriculum, offers a description of the term by stating, career readiness, "encompasses everything that a student needs to know in order to launch a successful occupational life" and career readiness skills are "the skills and knowledge students need to succeed in the real-world job market," (2018). The term career readiness skills can often be referred to as employability skills (Maxwell, Scott, McFarlane, & Williamson, 2010), soft-skills (Dabke, 2015), and 21st-century skills (Beriswill, Bracey, Sherman-Morris, Huang, & Lee, 2016). For the purpose of this study, the phrase "career readiness skills" will encompass all of the above expressions.

In the United States, approaches to college and career readiness are centered around federal policy that speaks to the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed, without remediation, in credit-bearing courses at a post-secondary institution or in a high-quality certificate program that enables students to enter a career pathway with potential future advancement (Conley, 2010). Some of the steps to achieve this goal call for a shift in how high school teachers prepare students in the classroom. The shift requires more rigorous, engaging, and relevant teaching and learning in high school to ensure that more students graduate with the skills they need to be college and career ready (College & Career Ready, 2018). Bray, Green, and Kay (2010) provide evidence to support content knowledge and

"applied skills,. including critical thinking and problem-solving, communication, collaboration, along with creativity and innovation skills," are necessary to be college and career ready (p.7). Unfortunately, these are all skills employers say are lacking in new workforce entrants. According to one study, 70 percent of recently hired high school graduates have deficits in areas like problem-solving and critical thinking (Corporate Workforce, n.d.). This study will focus on the career readiness skills students need to acquire in high school, not the college readiness skills because multiple studies have covered the academic side of preparing students for the post-secondary college option.

The need to prepare students to enter the changing workforce is the same for all K-12 institutions, no matter the structure or enrollment, but a one-size-fits-all approach to career readiness does not exist. In December 2017, the Indiana State Board of Education approved a new plan for high school graduation pathways that aim to ensure students leave high school with supplementary career readiness skills (Cox, 2017). These skills will be cultivated through each school district's college and career readiness program and taught by classroom teachers within the curriculum they presently teach. For example, research reveals it is difficult for rural high schools to provide various dual credit courses and learning opportunities that will meet the demands of the 21st-century job market (ACTE, 2015). Christopher Lagoni of Indiana Small and Rural Schools Association expressed concerns saying, "Many rural schools already have some career-oriented options, but the major challenge is to figure out how rural schools can fairly offer those options to all students and match those large programs with an abundance of available resources" (Lindsay, 2017). Rural schools face unique obstacles, such as funding, transportation, and technological and pedagogical challenges, because they are geographically dispersed and have a limited number of staff members to provide coursework. Despite these challenges, in

order to meet employer demands and prepare students for future occupational opportunities, career readiness skills must be incorporated into every classroom and tailored to meet the needs of high school students throughout the state. In line with these needs, this study will explore rural high school teachers' perspectives as they incorporate career readiness skills into their classroom practices along with the challenges they face in the process.

Push for Career Readiness Skills

Preparing students for the workforce is believed to be one way the United States can continue to compete in a global economy (Conley, 2014). The dynamics of today's working environment are different from the industrial structure of the past. Employment projections indicate a growing need for a better-educated and highly skilled workforce. Many employers and business groups point to a mismatch between the skills that prospective employees possess and the jobs that are available; this discrepancy has been referred to as the skills gap (Meyer, 2014). Today's workforce is characterized by global competition, diversity, innovation, and management skills that necessitate workers to be inquisitive and have a strong background in academic knowledge, critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills (Author, 2019). This skills gap continues to be a problem area because American students and schools are still falling short. According to Tony Wagner (2008), "there is a global achievement gap between what even our best suburban, urban, and rural public schools are teaching and testing versus what all students will need to succeed as learners, workers, and citizens in today's global knowledge economy" (p. 8).

In his exploration of the "the global achievement gap," Wagner asked several questions about the qualities and skills students need to be both competitive in the global market and contribute as global citizens. Before examining the extent to which educators are teaching and

testing the skills that matter most in the United States, Wagner discovered that even in the "good" schools, students were "simply not learning the skills that matter most for the 21st century" (Wagner, 2008, p.9). He wrote, "our system of public education, our curricula, teaching methods, and the tests we require students to take, were created in a different century for the needs of another era and are hopelessly outdated" (Wagner, 2008, p. 9). Times had changed; schools did not. There is now a demand for a new type of learning centered around teaching students to analyze and apply what they have learned to real-world situations. Schools have yet to respond to this demand. Wagner's research will be further discussed in chapter two.

In other research, Thomas Friedman (2009) wrote that the world has become smaller, so small in fact, that it is "flat." According to Friedman, a widespread leveling that is taking place, driven by new technology and software. He identified the following ten flatteners that are reshaping lives, business, and politics: creativity, connectivity, workflow software, uploading, outsourcing, offshoring, supply-chaining, in-sourcing, in-forming, and new technologies that amplify all other flatteners (p. 222). Because of these flatteners, workers will need to be good at managing and interacting with others even though this has always been an asset in the working world. Friedman goes on to say, "I'm not sure how to teach these skills as part of a classroom curriculum, but someone had better figure it out" (p. 306).

National policy groups have discussed the curricular need to construct an assortment of career readiness skills essential for success in the workplace and college. Since the publication of A Nation at Risk in 1983, which concluded that American schools were not preparing high school students for their next stage of life, the business community has exerted more pressure on elected officials to shape schools to be more responsive to workplace needs. A 1991 report by the U.S. Secretary of Labor's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS report) called

for many of the same skills-based competencies that educators and business leaders have recommended for the past twenty years. Likewise, Galloway's 1998 study of three American Cabinet Agencies (Labor, Education, and Commerce) found that the workplace and the economy, in addition to job requirements and training for those jobs, are changing and the basic skills gap between what business needs and the qualification levels of entry-level employees is widening. He concluded that to close the skills gap, the quality of education must be improved, businesses must assist schools, and the community must be mobilized to ensure the best education for young people and a high-quality workforce for the United States (Galloway, 1998).

Subsequently, since the passing of No Child Left Behind in 2001, high school college preparation coursework has been perceived to be the central component of rigor and success while career preparation, though just as relevant, has been viewed as less challenging and "reflects an outdated model that tolerates low expectations and is often misaligned with the evolving needs of the current labor market" (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2014, p.2). The challenge educators face today is ensuring the elements that make students successful in college and careers receive equal attention. These factors include "the ability to gain knowledge and apply new information, problem solve, communicate and collaborate with peers, and contribute to the greater good of humanity" (Daggett & Pedinotti, 2014). To that end, the literature indicates that academic performance and competency of career readiness skills should have never been separated in the first place. Now, more than ever, we must redefine and restructure classroom teaching and learning in ways that will equip students to deal with the challenges and unexpected circumstances they will encounter in the workforce (Daggett & Pedinotti, 2014).

In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced the No Child Left Behind.

Since that time, ESSA, the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) have come to play important and complementary roles in the education-to-workforce- pipeline (English, Cushing, Therriault, & Rasmussen, 2017). As stated previously, ESSA is the national education law passed by President Barack Obama in December 2015. It provides funding for public education from kindergarten through grade twelve and mandates that all students be taught to high academic standards that prepare them to achieve college and career readiness. The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act provides funds to states and other entities toward enhancing both secondary and post-secondary career and technical education (CTE) programs focused on preparing students for the real world (English, Cushing, Therriault, & Rasmussen, 2017). WIOA Title I funds the public workforce development system, which balances the labor market needs with education, training, and support services for youth and adults looking for meaningful employment. Together, ESSA, the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, and WIOA can facilitate an education to workforce context that provides individuals with the academic, technical and employability skills they need to be successful in the workforce (English, Cushing, Therriault, & Rasmussen, 2017). Suitable provisions from these federal policies filter down to individual classrooms and teachers. However, there is a gap in the research around teachers' perception of how they manage the implementation of the policies. This study addresses that gap.

Problem Statement

Workforce fluctuations and the upsurge of retiring baby boomers are causing businesses to become more outspoken about the necessity of high-quality, high school graduates who are ready for the workforce. Business owners are concerned that the younger US workforce is not nearly as well-educated and prepared as their peers in competing nations (Pawlowski & Katz,

2014). This perceived crisis has caused education reformers to call for higher expectations and more stringent standards for promotion from grade to grade and high school graduation. American society expects high schools to prepare all students with a curriculum focused on academic and technical skills needed to enter at least a two-year college (Chijioke, Barber, & Mourshed. 2012). However, there are challenges associated with this expectation due to the disconnect that exists between what the workforce requires regarding future employees and how young people are being prepared to enter the workforce with skills based on expectations from the Industrial Age (Collins & Halverson, 2009). According to Tony Wagner (2014), students are graduating from high school and college underprepared for the world of work. Fewer than a quarter of the more than 400 employers surveyed for a work-readiness study reported that new employees with four-year-college degrees have excellent scholastic knowledge and applied skills. Among those who employ young people right out of high school, nearly 50 percent said that their overall preparation was "deficient" (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2005). Moving forward, changes must be made in the way schools prepare students for the workforce.

There has been a substantial number of research and reports concerning college and career readiness programs that prepare students for post-secondary education and research has been completed to provide support for states as they prioritize career readiness skills in policy and instruction (American Institutes for Research, 2014). Multiple research projects in metropolitan areas have revealed how critical it is for teachers to integrate career readiness skills into classroom instruction and practices for all students to ensure they are ready for the demands of their adult life (Jacques, 2015). But little research has been done to explore the practitioners' perceptions of the integration and instruction of career readiness skills, especially in rural high school settings.

Preparation for this unknown labor market can be especially difficult for rural schools with diverse student populations and limited resources (Griffith & Finn, 2006). Research suggests that rural adolescents face more significant challenges in college and career development as they transition from high school. The majority of those same rural adolescents have lower career aspirations and greater probabilities for entering the workforce immediately after high school than adolescents who live in suburban or urban areas (Lapan, Tucker, SeKang & John, 2003). Additionally, employment opportunities for young people in geographic isolation are limited (Henderson, 2017). School-wide college and career readiness initiatives intend to prepare all students for post-secondary options, but those initiatives in rural communities face limitations (Conley, 2010). Research studies can be found that discuss methods rural high school teachers use to incorporate college and career readiness skills, particularly college readiness skills, but no research explores rural high school teachers' perspective as they incorporate career readiness skills into their classroom practices. This study seeks to add knowledge in this area.

State and local leaders have pointed out that a high school course completion and diploma are no longer the finish line. Under the new state guidelines, all students must earn a diploma by meeting the existing credit requirements plus complete a project, service, or work-based learning experience (Kelly, 2017). For rural communities around the state this could be problematic because rural communities have limited resources and "are unique in that local values, and opportunities exert influences on the attitudes of students and their families about education and careers, for better or for worse" (Hardre, Sullivan, and Crowson, 2010, p. 3). In Indiana, "nearly 40 percent of the state's 289 school corporations have less than 2,000 students according to 2014 data" (Chapman, 2017). It will be important for teachers in rural schools to be diligent to embed career readiness skills into the curriculum and classroom practices while at the same time

remaining considerate of local community values and family connections (Corbett, 2014). Teachers in these rural communities have a special relationship to students that may be less typical in large, non-rural schools (Redding & Wallberg, 2012), therefore, they must use this relationship to encourage students to assess and cultivate career readiness skills to meet the needs of employers and surrounding communities (Hardre, Crowskon, DeBacker & White, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

There is a gap in the literature regarding a connection between the integration of career readiness skills and content area high school teachers' perceptions of the incorporation of those skills into classroom practices. The purpose of this study is to explore rural high school teachers' perspectives as they incorporate career readiness skills into their classroom practices along with the obstacles they face in the process because "eighty-five percent of jobs that will exist in 2030 do not exist today" (Tencer, 2017) and students must acquire the skills they need to compete in a competitive global workforce.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. How do rural high school teachers incorporate career readiness skills into their classroom practices?
2. What obstacles are faced by rural high school teachers when integrating career readiness skills?
3. What integrated practices do rural high school teachers believe foster students' acquisition of career readiness skills?

What Follows

The chapters that follow will establish the research and methodological foundations of

this study. The literature review presented in Chapter Two will explore teachers' roles and responsibilities in the development of career readiness skills, influential studies and educational laws that support career readiness skills, as well as highlight the progression of the employability skills framework established by the U.S. Department of Education. Chapter Two will also examine the incorporation of career readiness skills into classroom practices as a way for teachers to link subject area content while at the same time provide meaningful learning experiences that develop the proficiencies and knowledge students need for today's modern workforce. With the rapid pace of globalization and the need for students to graduate from high school with skills necessary to tackle the challenges of the global economic market, educators struggle with the challenge of aligning educational classroom practices with the needs of present-day society and its elemental workforce. Educational policy, theory, and philosophy would benefit from progressing at the same pace as societal changes in order for programs to stay current and meaningful. The chapter will also address how these challenges are being met in Indiana with the implementation of the new graduation requirements for students in the graduating class of 2023. Moving forward, Hoosier teachers will be required to integrate career readiness skills into classroom practices to meet both the needs of society and the needs of each student. Moreover, the literature review will explore studies that have examined educational approaches teachers use to connect subject area content while providing meaningful learning opportunities that develop the skills and knowledge students need for today's modern workforce (McNamara, 2009). Finally, chapter two concludes with a description of the conceptual framework that supports this study of examining teachers' perceptions.

Chapter Three will present the study's methodological approach. For this study, I employed a qualitative, descriptive case study research design to gain insight into how individual

high school teachers perceptions of how they incorporated career readiness skills into their classroom practices, the challenges they face when integrating the career readiness skills, and explore the integrated practices teachers believed foster students' acquisition of career readiness skills. A case study is appropriate for this study because it "allows investigators to focus on a 'case' and retain a holistic and real-world perspective" (Yin, 2014, p. 4).

The targeted population for this study was identified through a convenience sample due to the location and accessibility of the high school. A total of nine academic high school teachers who serve students in one rural Indiana high school were the study's focus. Data collection methods for this case study included nine semi-structured interviews and one focus group interview and an artifact review, including email exchanges. First, I conducted semi-structured interviews with nine high school teachers, recorded and transcribed the data, plus documented non-verbal cues and reactions of participants to add to the transcription. At a later date, I conducted one focus group interview consisting of six teachers who also participated in the semi-structured interviews to add clarity, understanding, and validation to the study. Finally, through email, I assembled documents teachers believed correlated with career readiness skills or related to integrated practices used by the district to foster students' acquisition of career readiness skills. After organizing the documentation from transcriptions of both the face-to-face and focus group interviews and assembling the artifact documents, the data was analyzed and coded to "identify similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns, themes, categories, distinct differences between subgroups, and common sequences" (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014, p.10).

Significance

Knowledge has become the instrument of growth to meet the increasing demands of the

21st-century job market. K-12 institutions must prepare students to enter this changing workplace. In Indiana, school districts are aligning College and Career Readiness programs, including service-learning, and project-based learning opportunities, with core content curricula and Career Technical Education courses to provide high school students with academic, technical, and career readiness skills needed to compete in the global labor market effectively.

This research was conducted to provide baseline data for rural schools in Indiana regarding high school teachers' perspectives of incorporating career readiness skills. This research increased the understanding of the educational approaches taken by content area teachers in a rural Indiana high school to embed rigorous, high performing career readiness skills into their classroom practices. Casey-Hansen's 2014 study, Bridging the Gap in Workforce Readiness, recommended further study to compare the teachers' perspectives in relation to the development of career readiness skills, specifically, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills of students. Fundamentally, this study illuminated teachers' understanding and implementation of career readiness in a rural Indiana high school. The information gathered in this research is relevant to educational practitioners, administrators, employers, and policymakers, especially those focused on the new Indiana graduation mandates and current Indiana labor markets.

Studying rural high schools is important. Nearly 30 percent of schools in the United States are rural, serving nearly one-fifth of all public-school students (Lavalley, 2018). However, until recent transformations, only 6 percent of the research conducted in schools has utilized rural schools (Hardre, Sullivan, & Crowson, 2009). Based on an in-depth study done by the Kellogg Foundation of rural, urban, and suburban Americans, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research provided evidence for the Kellogg Foundation that many of the respondents have strong, positive

views of rural life in America, “the rural areas are ideal locations to live and raise a family, they are friendly, peaceful, and filled with traditional American values”. For other respondents, the rural area seems discouraging and less attractive, as there is usually a higher occurrence of limited, low wage employment, fewer job opportunities, poverty, and an upsurge in drug use and crime (Kellogg Foundation, 2002). Regardless of perception, schools are often the anchor in rural communities (Nelson, 2010). The schools’ ability to meet students’ needs is tied directly to the well-being of the communities they serve.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The traditional model of education, born in the industrial age with a one-size-fits-all approach, is not meeting the needs of American students or our knowledge economy (Baker, 2013). In order to thrive in modern society, our next generation of workers must be equipped with the skills, values, characteristics, and knowledge to meet the ever-changing demands of a world in which both knowledge and tools for learning are changing rapidly (Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit, & Pittenger, 2014). The state of Indiana has addressed the requests for change with the implementation of new graduation requirements, beginning with students graduating in 2023. To comply with this mandate, meet the needs of each student and local and global employers, teachers must incorporate career readiness skills into classroom content. This literature review examined career readiness and the incorporation of those skills into curricula as a means for teachers to connect subject area content while, at the same time, providing meaningful learning experiences that advance students' skills and knowledge as well as prepare them for the modern workforce.

The current study aligns with ongoing research in that both recognize the skills needed to be successful in the workplace and post-secondary education overlap. Just as the present study has done, recent research has been completed to explore teaching practices that improve rural student outcomes, mental health, and communication skills at the secondary level (Jacobson, 2019). Also, scholars in these areas have been working with rural educators to learn what is working and what is not working in a rural school environment related to college and career readiness (Bissell, 2017). Similar to the current study, other studies have explored ways to increase everyone's awareness of the need to expand classroom practices related to career

readiness skills, including work done by Tony Wagner (2008) and William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (2013).

In this chapter, I will first touch on research in rural schools since so many of my findings are tied to a rural, isolated (more than 25 miles from a metropolitan area) high school. Next, I will review high school teacher's roles and responsibilities they have in the manner of incorporating career readiness skills into teaching practices. Then, I will provide readers with a foundation of college and career readiness, including instrumental studies that establish parameters surrounding public education and America's workforce. Following the section on influential studies, I will examine educational laws that frame career readiness and highlight the progression of the employability skills framework established by the U.S. Department of Education. This chapter concludes with a discussion of constructivism and deeper learning as the conceptual framework that surrounds the research aligned with incorporating career readiness skills into teaching practices as teachers in small rural high schools prepare students for careers in the 21st century.

Research in Rural Schools

Rural schools have gone unnoticed for many years but have recently have once again received an increased amount of attention at the national level. For years these schools have been overlooked, at least from a national perspective, because the majority of American students attend urban or suburban schools (Lavalley, 2018). However, in recent data from the National Council of Educational Statistics, at a national level, approximately 19% of all students are enrolled in rural schools, and in some states, including Indiana, that number jumps to one in three students (2016). When you break it down to one in three students, the nation can no longer afford to overlook or minimize the needs and successes of students attending rural schools.

The definition of rural spans into three categories, rural fringe, rural distant, and rural remote. Rural fringe is defined as a community that is five miles from an urbanized area; rural distant refers to a community that is more than five miles but less than 25 miles from an urban area; and rural remote denotes a community is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). For the purpose of this study, the ruralness of River City High School falls into the rural distant category since it is less than 25 miles from an urbanized area.

Since historically only 6 percent of school research is done in a rural setting (Hadre, Sullivan, & Crowson, 2009), little is understood about rural schools and the challenges they face outside the communities in which they function. Also, making the research difficult in rural schools is the broad regional discrepancies that can affect the data (Lavalley, 2018). Recent research has led the researcher to find documents testifying that rural schools have started to receive increased attention with the Institute for Education Science, the University of Missouri, and the University of California, Irvine. More than thirty million dollars is being used to focus research on improving rural student outcomes, mental health, and writing at the secondary level (Jacobson, 2019). Researchers in these areas will be working with rural educators to learn what is working and what is not working in their rural school environment. Through research, professors hope to help these educators gain insights into the challenges their schools face, then build the capacity and use the data for improvements and change (Jacobson, 2019).

To my knowledge, no further federal funding is being allotted for research in Indiana's rural schools, but Diana Quintero and Yuhe Gu, research analysts with the Brown Center on Education Policy wrote one recent paper finding that while rural students are more likely to graduate high school than those in urban areas, rural students have lower college enrollment

rates. Quintero explains, “one factor causing the low college enrollment is that 14 percent of schools in rural areas do not have access to school counselors, who provide information to students about career and post-secondary academic options” (Kuhlman, 2019). Indiana’s student-to-counselor ratio averaged 541 to one between 2005 and 2015, more than double the recommended figure (Kuhlman, 2019). It will be interesting to see if the outcomes of Quintero’s paper factor into the equation of new graduation mandates in Indiana, requiring students to be career-ready.

Teacher’s Roles and Responsibilities

Schools play a pivotal role in the development of students’ career readiness skills and career exploration. This involvement, in turn, puts teachers in a position to align and incorporate skills students need in the world of work with course content. John Rosenbaum from Northwest University provides research to support the fact that teachers need to develop their career readiness knowledge and forge closer ties with students enabling them to speak openly and honestly about alternative pathways to good jobs that do not require a four-year degree.

Rosenbaum believes teachers have a responsibility to increase their knowledge and obtain information that will help “work-bound” students prepare for education, training, or jobs after high school. Rosenbaum states teachers need to develop relationships with students so they can honestly inform them of what it takes to succeed and prepare them for that long road ahead. “Teachers could do more to alert students who are unlikely to earn a bachelor’s degree to the difficult road ahead, and to provide information about certificates and associate’s degrees that lead to desirable jobs” (Rosenbaum, Stephan, & Rosenbaum, 2010).

The roles and responsibilities of teachers and their involvement in the career readiness process have been the topic of conversation since schools have been required to offer career

direction to students with the passing of the 2011 Education Act (Hooley, 2015). According to Hooley, Watts, and Andrews (2015), the respective roles of the teachers has changed over time. Teachers now have the primary responsibility for delivering career readiness skills to students by incorporating them into their classroom practices. On many occasions, students turn to their teachers for advice and guidance with the classroom providing a productive setting where students can develop the skills that employers want. Listed below are a wide-range of classroom practices teachers can utilize to support students as they prepare for their futures, build the skills they need, and plan to make successful transitions after graduation:

1. It is essential for teachers to talk about their academic history, and they should not avoid talking about academic and social struggles. Share personal stories of missing out on social events to stay in and study, prioritizing and reaching out to others for help (Gatens, 2015).
2. Teachers need to remind students that they are a resource for guidance or assistance with a problem or concern related to the skills students need to develop or future career choices (Gatens, 2015).
3. Teachers should connect the subject they teach to the world of work. For example, having a guest speaker visit the classroom to discuss ways a particular science process is used in an industry can increase the students' perceived relevance of the curriculum. The visitor can also talk with students about how they use the knowledge and skills covered in the course on a day-to-day basis (Hooley, 2015).

4. Teachers can help students connect with someone outside the world of education who can offer assistance with employment guidance or opportunities (Gatens, 2015).
5. Teachers should listen carefully to students and ask questions that inspire them to think deeper about what's giving them trouble, then guide them to prepare a personal reaction or response. An experience such as this can build perseverance and grit within the student (Gatens, 2015).

Author and innovator Tony Wagner provided evidence in his book, *The Global Achievement Gap,* that high school students must acquire career readiness skills before they graduate from high school. He argues that students in the United States are not "jury ready" if they leave high school without acquiring the skills to be able to analyze an argument, weigh evidence, and detect bias. Wagoner defines his "seven survival skills" students need to succeed in college, in the workplace, and in life. The seven skills include problem-solving and critical thinking, collaboration across networks, adaptability, initiative, effective oral and written communication, analyzing information, and developing curiosity and imagination (Wagner, 2008, p. 67). Wagner also supports the need for teachers to incorporate career readiness skills into classroom practices. He argues that teachers need to provide opportunities for students to play, be passionate about learning, and be innovative. To make this happen, teachers must collaborate, model, and take part in professional development to become more confident and competent in teaching students career readiness skills (Wagner, 2012).

A great deal of conversation is taking place among employers and educators about 21st century skills, social and emotional learning, the development of soft skills, grit, resilience, and character (all career readiness skills). However, there is no substantial evidence that any of these

skills are being taught in the best schools across the country (Wagner, 2008, p. 72). This lack of evidence heightens the concern that public schools in the United States are not changing to meet the needs of the 21st-century workforce, where employees need to be critical thinkers, collaborators, effective communicators, entrepreneurs, and life-long learners (Wagner, 2011). Looking at the research, teaching these skills require teachers to take a different approach to instruction. Wagner said, "schools need to teach students how to engage with and process information at a higher level than they are used to" (Wagner, 2011), Teachers must utilize a cross-curricular, interdisciplinary approach to instruction, one that encourages all teachers, regardless of area of specialization, to engage students and help them develop and discover their interest, abilities, and dispositions while fostering career readiness skills at the same time.

Career Readiness Skills

Four influential studies laid the foundation for all subsequent research regarding skills acquired in high school and the skills students need to prepare for the changing American workforce. A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform (United States, 1983), Forgotten Half: Pathways to Success for America's Youth and Young Families: Final Report (William T. Grant Foundation, 1988), Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) (Labour, 1991) and Tough Choices or Tough Times: The Report of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2008) all express concerns for the future of the American economy in relation to public education. The reports reference low achievement scores and insufficient fundamental skills associated with high school students leaving them ill-prepared for the high skilled, high wage jobs of a rapidly changing 21st-century society.

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education, formed by Terrell Bell,

the U.S. Secretary of Education, created "an open letter to the American people" (U.S. Department of Education, 1983). The report, A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform, communicated the inadequacies of the United States education system and urged elected officials, educators, parents, and students to reform public education. This report catapulted an education reform movement that brought attention to education as a whole. The report had undertones implicating the education system for the stagnant economy in the 1970s (Symonds, Schwartz & Ferguson, 2011). The most famous lines of this widely publicized report declared that "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation as a people" (U.S. Department of Education, 1983). The authors of the report described the American education system as ordinary and called for the creation of a measurable level of educational achievement that would enable students to prepare for jobs in the 21st-century and remain competitive in a global economy.

In the 1988, Forgotten Half: Pathways to Success for America's youth and young families, the William T. Grant Foundation made policymakers aware that schools have failed to prepare all students for high skill, high wage jobs (Perry & Wallace, 2012). The report also analyzed the significant obstacles facing American young people between the ages of 16 to 24 in terms of education, career, and family life (Halperin, 1987). "Non-college-bound young people, in particular, are beset on every side with a series of circumstances that severely limit their prospects" (William T. Grant Foundation, 1988). Their opportunities for a job with a future, one that can provide personal growth, a chance to master new skills, or the opportunity for economic prosperity their parents experienced continues to decline over time; once individuals fall behind, they tend to remain behind. The Forgotten Half Report recommended that an integration of

home, school, and community was necessary to achieve success. “Efforts to produce success in school, without supplementary efforts in families and communities, are unlikely to make a difference” (William T. Grant Foundation, 1988). In 2015, this report was again revisited and updated to include young adult’s struggles during the “college for all” era and the difficulties they faced as they navigated their way through the trials of post-secondary education and into the workforce. The report disclosed barriers and challenges that young people faced as they pursued educational prospects after high school. The report finds the difficulties are due to the misalignment between high school and post-secondary education, the absence of clear pathways into fields of study or training, and lack of guidance by instructional staff regarding skills and opportunities necessary for post-secondary success (Brand, 2015). The report recognized half of the nation’s youth, not just those in poverty, were struggling to attain responsible roles and positive career prospects related to being an adult (Deeds & Thomas, 2018). Conversely, this report did offer solutions such as individual supports for at-risk youth, better alignment among high schools and post-secondary institutions, and improved school-to-work- pathways (Rosenbaum & Rosenbaum, 2015).

In 1991, the Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), issued an initial report, What Work Requires of Schools, which examined the demands of the workplace and whether young people were capable of meeting those demands. The report identified the fundamental skills and workplace competencies required by high-performing employers that would enable the United States’ industries to maintain their global competitive advantage in productivity and innovation (Department of Labor, 1991). The skills and competencies included in the report comprise interpersonal skills, information gathering skills, technical skills, thinking skills, and personal qualities including, individual responsibility, all of which align with the

career readiness skills of the 21st-century workforce. Three significant conclusions resulted from this report: (1) all United States high school students must cultivate the competencies and foundational skills; (2) the high-performance qualities of the most competitive companies must become the standard for most companies; (3) the nation's schools must become high performance organizations (Department of Labor, 1991).

In 2006, a two-year comprehensive report entitled: Tough Choices or Tough Times: The Report of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, addressed career readiness skill. This report pointed out that the United States could no longer take pride in having the best-educated workforce in the world. Even now, the United States is still in competition with countries that can offer large numbers of highly educated workers willing to work for low wages. Over the past thirty years, one country after another, including China and South Korea, has surpassed the United States in the percentage of people entering the workforce with the equivalent of a high school diploma, with many other countries on the verge of doing so (Dillon, 2010). The report also articulated the necessity for the United States workforce to possess the following skills in order for American trades to remain competitive, including: strong skills in English, mathematics, technology, and science, as well as a level of comfort with ideas and abstractions, good at analysis and synthesis, remain creative and innovative, self-disciplined and well organized, as well as able to learn quickly and work collaboratively with members of a team. The report claimed America's education system was inadequate in carrying out the promise that every child will receive an education, which leads to a good job, productive life, and responsible citizenship. The study concluded that change must take place to ensure the workforce and economy in the United States do not decline to a point where investors from around the world look away from the United States to obtain a higher return on their investment.

Education Laws that Support Career Readiness Skills

Three education laws have played essential and complementary roles in educating and training our nation's workforce and include Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (2006), The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) (2014), and Every Student Succeeds Act (2015). These laws established guidelines and standards for federal, state, and local policymakers as they work to initiate, improve, and modernize programs that address the skills gap and the need for industry leaders to build a competitive global workforce. All three of these laws have been adapted or reformed to meet the needs of the changing innovative society (Bauman, Christensen, & AEI, 2018). It is teachers who are tasked with implementing these policies in their classrooms, hence the importance of this research study.

The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (2006) has provided funding to states and other grantees to improve both secondary and post-secondary career and technical education (CTE) programs focused on preparing students for employment. The Perkins Act also aligns the labor market needs with education, training, and support services for youth and adults looking for meaningful employment (American Institute of Research, 2017). A federal formula is used by districts to determine their level of Perkins funding. This formula is based on the number of youth and youth in poverty living in a school corporation compared to the total number of youth and youth in poverty around the state (Indiana Department of Education, 2017). In 2017, Indiana's allocation of the Perkins funds was $24,687,262, a reduction of approximately $350,000 from the previous year (Indiana Department of Education, 2017). According to the IDOE, the decrease in funds was likely due to a population shift that caused an imbalance to the formula, which is mentioned in the allocation recommendations. Perkins fund usage is closely monitored by federal regulators; eighty-five percent of the funds have been distributed to local

programs. In Indiana, that equates to distribution between 49 school districts throughout the state. The school corporation where this study will take place, River City, does not receive Perkins funding. However, the affiliated vocational center where student from RCHS go to participate in career and technical education courses does. River City schools will be introduced later in this chapter.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)(2014) has created an opportunity for state and community leaders to "rethink, reshape, and magnify workforce systems, policies, and practices that are substantiated in research and experience to improve the education and employability of low-income families" (Bird, Foster, & Ganz-Glass, 2014, p. 3). To receive WIOA funds, the governor of each state must submit a unified or combined state plan to the U.S. Secretary of Labor that outlines a four-year workforce development strategy for the state's workforce development system, (Indiana WorkOne, 2017). The state of Indiana has taken advantage of this opportunity. In 2017 Indiana's allotment of WIOA funds included $15, 281,190 for youth activities, including tutoring programs and occupational skills training (Indiana WorkOne, 2017). Three factors were taken into consideration when determining this amount of money: the number of unemployed individuals, the number of excess unemployed individuals, and the number of disadvantaged youth (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2017). Funds from this grant source are regulated and monitored by location, referred to as regions. Southern Indiana is part of the Economic Growth Region 10 and was identified by the regional economic development organization as being the fastest growing regional economy having 20% of the area workforce, but 80% of area economic growth and opportunity (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2017). The River City Community School Corporation does not utilize Workforce Development services at this time; therefore, WIOA funding does not impact RCHS.

In 2015 ESEA (otherwise known as No Child Left Behind) was reformed and retitled Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This federal law provides funding for public education from kindergarten through 12th grade for schools with a significant number of children in poverty and has changed the ground rules for the control of K-12 education. The current reauthorization eliminated Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), allowing states to establish their own goals and milestones and hold high schools accountable based on results on standardized tests in reading, math, and science, English language learner proficiency, students with disabilities, graduation rates, and at least one nonacademic measure. In Indiana that is attendance (ASCD, 2016). "These changes have created new opportunities for innovation and emphasized the importance of putting career-ready on an equal academic footing with college ready" (Daggett, & McNulty, 2016). One of the more global properties of ESSA is that it has shifted a great deal of the decision-making power back to the states and local school districts. Therefore, it provides more flexibility to create and implement teacher evaluation systems and school performance assessments (Wardlow, 2016). Critical provisions of ESSA regarding career readiness include an updated definition of a "well-rounded education," and the law changes the accountability requirements to permit states to include measures of school and student success beyond core academic subjects (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2018). "Specifically, ESSA requires states to use at least one indicator of school quality or student success in addition to the required academic indicators in their accountability systems" (Achieve, 2016, p. 3). Indiana is one of only seven states that decided to take advantage of the flexibility to cultivate career readiness in the overall plan. Indiana used Title II money from the federal department of education to "hike up the number of educators certified for dual enrollment" (Klein, 2017), meaning teachers were

provided with resources, including scholarships to gain the degrees or licensures they needed to teach “dual enrollment” courses which count as both high school and post-secondary credit

Key Premises of Career Readiness

Since the launch of Sputnik in 1957, the perception of education has evolved from basic training in mathematics, reading, and writing to an expectation that every student will go to college (Cambron-McCabe, Cunningham, Harvey, & Koff, 2013). During the 1960s and 1970s, factory owners faced a shortage of skilled workers, which prompted high schools to prepare students for jobs with specific skills for the manufacturing, trade, and service industries (Occupation Outlook Handbook, 1968). In the 1970s, only 26% of middle-class workers had any kind of education beyond high school, and most of them worked to develop the skills they would use for a lifetime of work in one particular industry (Hanford, 2014). The 1980s brought a shift in the economic demand for more innovative, cognitive skills and changed the industrial structure of the United States to include more technical, clerical, service, and managerial work; it was believed by most that college became the ticket to the middle class, “the be-all-and-end-all of K-12 education” (Samuelson, 2012). In the 1990s, college became a default decision for many high school students because parents, educators, and political leaders urged everyone to obtain a four-year degree. Students were unaware of alternative career options that did not require them to attend college (Gray, 2000). In the early 2000s, pressure placed on high school students to pursue further education after high school continued to mount, making students often feel that college was their only option. The fixation on a college education for all students has progressed to an obsession over the past twenty-five years, leading to a significant blunder in the education system (McDonough, 2005). According to James Rosenbaum of Northwestern University, “It is time to develop credible alternatives for students unlikely to be pursuing a college degree, or

who may not be ready to do so right after high school. One way to make this transformation is to forge closer ties between high school and careers to provide students a better understanding of real-life" (Gross & Marcus, 2018).

Appeals similar to Rosenbaum's have been explored for years. In multiple studies conducted during the 1990s (Wentzel, Weinberger, Ford, & Feldman, 1990; Cooper, 1992; Cohen & Besharov, 2002; Bozick, 2009), employers declared students were not exploring the option of blue-collar jobs because high school counselors were pushing college for everyone instead of providing career and technical education recommendations or other alternative opportunities for students (Cohen & Besharov, 2002, 2004). Surveys of employers suggested a skilled worker would earn more money per year than a college graduate if companies were able to find high school graduates with the necessary work-related skills. This presumption by employers participating in the studies implied that high schools were not doing their job preparing students for employment after graduation (Cohen & Besharov, 2002, 2004).

Fast forward twenty years, and today, employers still claim high schools are not doing their job to prepare students for employment as we stand on the brink of what is known as the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Sikka, 2016). The technological transformations of this era and changes in the economy are compelling the next generation of students to "be equipped to tackle a number of different jobs along a career pathway, jobs that include many more twists and turns than previous generations including the ability to perform a variety of skills that are not necessarily a part of the traditional classroom experience" (Kuzmich, 2016). Students need to acquire "skills and characteristics that will help them to succeed in a global service environment; specific skills include resiliency, problem-solving, strategic thinking, project management, and the ability to work with a team" (Kuzmich, 2016). In other words, career and technical readiness

is about learning to think critically and be flexible as opposed to a procurement of a set of specific skills.

President Barack Obama also recognized the need to do more to inspire, engage, and prepare modern students for the global economy. In his 2010 State of the Union Address, President Obama incentivized change to state's public education systems by encouraging the adoption of college and career-ready standards for teaching and learning. The President also provided funds to "develop groundbreaking high school models and partnerships with colleges and employers, so students graduate better equipped for the demands of the innovative economy" (Rodriguez, 2015). While this speech supported a goal for America's education system, "every student should graduate from high school ready for college or a career," states definitions for college and career readiness have some inconsistencies (US Department of Education, 2014). For example, twenty-one states' definition of "college and career readiness" mention actual knowledge, skills, and dispositions that students must demonstrate mastery before they are recognized as prepared for post-secondary success (Mishkind & Career Readiness & Success Center at American Institute for Research, 2014). According to the Center on Education Policy, these skills and dispositions fit into six categories, and more than half of the 21 states include at least four of the following six actionable categories:

1. *Academic knowledge* – Nineteen states require some form of academic content knowledge, including English and mathematics, for students to be considered college and career ready.
2. *Critical thinking and problem-solving* – Fourteen states' definitions require students to demonstrate critical thinking or problem-solving to be deemed college and career ready. These skills authorize students to reason, evaluate or apply prior

knowledge, employ effective speaking and active listening strategies as well as use technology to access the reliability of the information at hand.

3. *Social and emotional learning, collaboration, and communication* – Fourteen states' definitions require students to demonstrate collaboration, communication, and social and emotional learning skills.
4. *Grit/resilience/perseverance* – Eight states' definitions of college and career readiness include these "readiness behaviors" such as goal setting, persistence, and resourcefulness.
5. *Citizenship and community involvement* – Citizenship is included in readiness definitions in eight states. Most include citizenship within the context of what it means to be ready for post-secondary education and workforce training.
6. *Other Additional Activities* – Only six of the 37 states mention an actionable item outside the five listed above. However, Indiana was not one of those states. (Mishkind & Career Readiness & Success Center at American Institute for Research, 2014).

A review of these actionable priorities leads to an understanding of the complexities behind college and career readiness. These categories reflect the perceptions that preparedness for college and careers is multifaceted, encompassing academic readiness aligned with knowledge, abilities, and personal dispositions that impact preparation and achievement (College and Career Readiness, 2014). The understanding of these complexities makes clear the necessity for educational advances to continually evolve for American students to be competitive in the new world economy.

The new progressive world economy gives employers more flexibility when filling

positions. In many instances, employers do not require new employees to have a four-year college diploma to begin their careers. A high school graduate can be ready for an actual career if she has the awareness and skills necessary to qualify for and succeed in the post-secondary job training or education required for a chosen career (Conley, 2014). When an individual obtains a job with only a high school diploma there is no guarantee of personal growth, advancement or mobility, however, if the individual demonstrates the knowledge, skills, and qualities desired by the employer, the post-secondary training may be provided by the employer through community college, technical training, apprenticeship or significant on-the-job training (Lerman, 2009). For all high school students to meet high standards of college and career readiness and be marketable for career options, schools need to ensure the graduates have in-depth content knowledge and the skills prized by employers in a changing world economy.

Career readiness in high school has a range of skill requirements, no defined endpoint, and lead to lifelong learning. According to the Workforce Board, Career Readiness Partner Council (n.d.), "to be career-ready in our ever-changing global economy requires adaptability and a commitment to lifelong learning, along with mastery of fundamental knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will vary from one career to another and change over time as a person grows and progresses along a developmental continuum" (p. 3). Career readiness also includes academic and technical skills and the ability to apply those skills to real-life situations (ACTE, 2015). Further, a career-ready individual demonstrates an understanding of their employability knowledge, skills, and personal attributes. Each individual must have an understanding of his or her strengths and weaknesses as well as an understanding of the skills and personal attributes he or she will need to attain and maintain employment in today's fast-paced, global economy. According to Conley (2010), career readiness skills and personal attributes also include "the

ability to work independently and as a member of a team, follow directions, formulate and solve problems, learn continuously, analyze information, have personal goals, take responsibility for one's actions, demonstrate leadership as appropriate, take initiative and direct one's own actions within an organizational context, and have perspective on one's place with an organization and in society" (p.5). Conley goes on to communicate, "many of these characteristics are necessary for success in the workplace but can also be vital to students who want to pursue post-secondary education" (p. 6).

For too many years, high school graduates throughout the United States have faced post-secondary decisions immediately after high school without being prepared to make those decisions. One pathway led to a four-year college, the other to an entry-level job. Some students selected a route for themselves, while others were tracked based on test scores, race, or income (Kalogrides & Loeb, 2013). In today's 21st century global economy, the choices are more complicated and interconnected, and the crossroads met by students have been replaced by multiple pathways, all of which require a rigorous and productive high school experience that equips all students, not just some, with the skills and personal attributes they need for individual college and career success (Workforce Board, Career Readiness Partner Council, n.d.).

Progression of Employability Skills Framework

It is widely accepted both in the United States and around the world that education and career readiness must be interconnected. All students should obtain career readiness skills alongside academic and technical skills to ensure they have the foundational skills, knowledge, and competencies to navigate the global world of work. To bring commonality to the efforts of policymakers, educators, and employers around the country, the United States Department of Education (USDOE) developed a standard definition for career readiness skills: "general skills

necessary for success in the labor market at all employment levels and in all sectors" (2014). To further develop these connections and efforts, the USDOE, along with the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, and twelve other federal agencies worked together to compile the Employability Skills Framework, which combines a set of overlapping skills from both workforce and education sectors. (Ascend and Futureworks, 2018). Many states, including Indiana, have recognized the importance of these skills and utilized this framework to develop analogous state-level standards, curriculum, and frameworks.

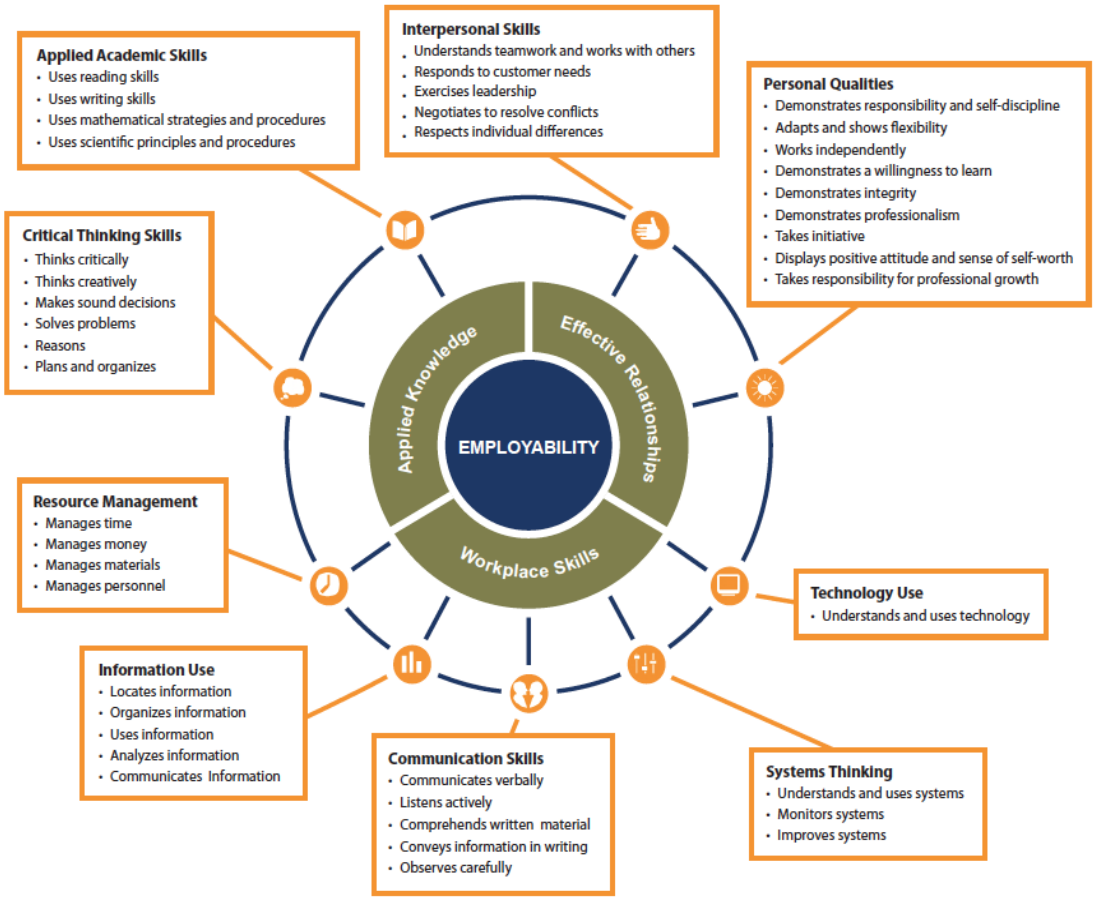

Figure 1: Employability Skills Framework (U.S. Dept. of Education, n.d.).

Based on research conducted by the College & Career Readiness & Success Center, Center on Great Teachers and Leaders (GTL), and RTI International, the Employability Skills Framework is an accumulation of existing employability skills standards and assessments that are common around the world (Jacques, 2015). The framework offers a clear, consistent illustration of the "intangible skills" that are valuable in the workplace as well as post-secondary education institutions including the non-cognitive skills, soft skills, grit, 21st -century skills, emotional intelligence and workplace readiness skills (U.S. Department of Education, & Office of Career, Adult and Technical Education (2015). The USDOE offers educators, parents, and industry leaders a collection of online resources associated with the framework that is simple to use and offers common reference points to corresponding skills that are equally important to all sectors.

The Employability Skills Framework is broken down into three categories: effective relationships, workplace skills, and applied skills. First, effective relationships refer to the skills that enable individuals to interact effectively with clients, coworkers, and supervisors. The interpersonal skills and personal qualities in this category allow employees to collaborate with members of a team or work independently to contribute to the overarching goals of the workplace. Next, workplace skills include abilities employees need to successfully perform work tasks. These involve resource management, information use, communication skills, systems thinking, and technology use. Understanding and using the skills in this category can help students and employees feel more engaged in their work because they see how they are part of a more extensive system that incorporates various elements or individual job responsibilities into a larger whole or the overall mission of the classroom or business. Finally, applied skills refer to the integration of academic knowledge and technical skills put to practical use in the workplace.

For example, thinking critically in the workplace allows an individual to identify, analyze and solve problems systematically to determine the value and relevance of an idea or argument (U.S. Department of Education, & Office of Career, Adult, and Technical Education (2015).

As seen in Figure 1, the Employability Skills Framework provides parents, educators, and industry leaders with direction about which foundational skills must be taught either in the classroom or in the workplace. The framework also provides state and district leaders with the data and information related to creating strategic action plans for integrating and prioritizing career readiness skills (American Institute for Research, 2019). Across the country, state education leaders have used the framework to find connections within their college and career readiness initiatives. Illinois, for instance, used the framework to visually create a "Crosswalk" to outline areas of overlap between academic, technical, and employability skills relative to common core standards and provide evidence for purposeful and strategic curriculum integration (Gibson & Goldammer, 2016). To clarify, a critical thinking "crosswalk" would include:

Critical Thinking	**ELA– Common Core Standard**	**Math—Common Core Standard**
Thinks critically, thinks creatively, makes sound decisions, plans and organizes, and solves problems (p.11)	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific evidence to support conclusions drawn from text (p.11)	CCSS.MATH.PRACTICE.MP2: Reason abstractly and quantitatively (p.11).

The connections made among these skills and standards allow districts across the state to provide evidence for teachers and other stakeholders, so they can identify applicable career readiness skills and integrate those skills into classroom instruction, share what career readiness skills are and why they are essential, and help students identify and share experiences that can validate their most reliable career readiness skills to employers (Gibson & Goldammer, 2016).

Constructivism and Deeper Learning

Until the late 1990s, the behaviorist theory of learning was the primary focus of classroom instructional strategies. This theory used a system of rewards and punishments to foster desired behaviors or reduce unwanted behaviors, respectively (Stein, 2011; Pitler, Hubbell, Kuhn, & Malenoski, 2007). The teacher worked to create a positive classroom environment by generating clear classroom rules and providing positive reinforcements for completing tasks or on target behaviors. During instruction in a behaviorist classroom, the teacher used drill and practice activities to help students master content and skills. Generally, these skills were learned by students before they moved on to the next topic. Today, the behaviorist theory of teaching and learning has become more contentious as educators throughout the country strive to help students adapt to 21st-century learning using approaches surrounded by the theory of constructivism (Hubbell, Kuhn, & Pitler, 2007). This theory encourages students to construct their understanding of the world in which they live. They search for tools to help them understand their experiences and draw conclusions from those experiences (Schrader, 2015).

Constructivism holds that human knowledge is developed and more firmly ingrained by the daily interaction of personal experiences combined with levels of familiarity (Schrader, 2015). It is essential for educators always to consider the significance of the theoretical argument of constructivism as it has an impact on teachers and teaching. Constructivism is a theory that

describes learning, not a method of teaching (Kemp, n.d.). Although a teacher may make decisions and may base actions on beliefs that are consistent with constructivism, as a theory, constructivism does not suggest how an individual should learn but explains how learners construct knowledge. Having an understanding of this theory of constructivism enables teachers to reflect on the goals of teaching, classroom organization consistency, and the pedagogical strategies and methods adopted to promote deeper learning (Kemp, n.d.).

According to the American Institute for Research (AIR), deeper learning can be defined as "the combination of (1) a deeper understanding of core academic content, (2) the ability to apply that understanding to novel problems and situation, and (3) the development of a range of competencies, including people skills and self-control" (American Institute for Research, 2016 p.2). Many supporters of new standards believe academic knowledge and skills alone will not offer students the opportunity to successfully navigate the rapidly changing society, participate in a complex democracy, or engage in the ever-evolving 21st-century workplace (Vander Ark & Schneider, 2014). For students to be able to confront new challenges, take initiative, and persevere through difficult tasks, a student must be able to communicate their ideas effectively, think creatively, work collaboratively to solve problems, and manage their learning. The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (2013) has identified six competencies that align with deeper learning, including:

1. mastery of core academic content
2. critical thinking and problem-solving
3. effective communication
4. ability to work collaboratively
5. learning how to learn

6. developing an academic mindset

Research completed in 2012 by members of a national nonprofit, the JFF Foundation, Barbara Cervone and Kathleen Cushman aligned the six competencies of deeper learning with constructivist student-centered learning where students exercise both choice and responsibility and teachers facilitate and coach instead of giving direct instruction (2012). Through interviews with teachers, students, administrators, and observations of them at work (in classrooms, exhibitions, and the community), Cervone and Cushman found that student-centered teachers support each student in developing a relationship to learn. They also discovered that student-centered teachers shift among roles, including curriculum planner, advisor, and community connector. Finally, they found that student-centered teachers identified themselves as life-long learners (Cervone and Cushman, 2012).

Conceptual Framework

The theory of constructivism and deeper learning come together along with teacher roles and career readiness skills to form the conceptual framework for this study. Both constructivism and deeper learning embrace individual knowledge utilized and transferred and both encourage teachers to take on roles and responsibilities to cultivate their knowledge and understanding of a thought, idea, or notion which, will, in turn, lead to discussions that will enable students to be deliberate and create varying interpretations of the same concept (Landis, 2008). Most importantly, both the theory of constructivism and deeper learning focus on a real-world learning process with lessons coordinated by teachers that offer students opportunities to engage in career readiness skills like active problem solving, meaningful inquiry, and personal reflection. Those skills are all encompassed in the employability skills framework (Tam, 2000).

In this study, the researcher will engage teachers to reflect on their roles and

responsibilities as they incorporate career readiness skills into their teaching practices as well as the value of building relationships in the process. Additionally, this study seeks to gain further understanding of how teachers utilized classroom practices to engage students in learning opportunities and experiences, both inside the classroom and out, that will foster the career readiness skills they will need for post-secondary careers. The conceptual framework assimilates constructivism with career readiness skills, teacher roles, and responsibilities, and deeper learning competencies and then aligns them to the questions about how teachers incorporate career readiness standards in their core content areas. Figure 2 displays the confluence of the concepts that lead to the primary area of interest, teachers' perspective as they relate to the broader topics. Relationships and differentiation among these concepts will be summarized, analyzed, and collated.

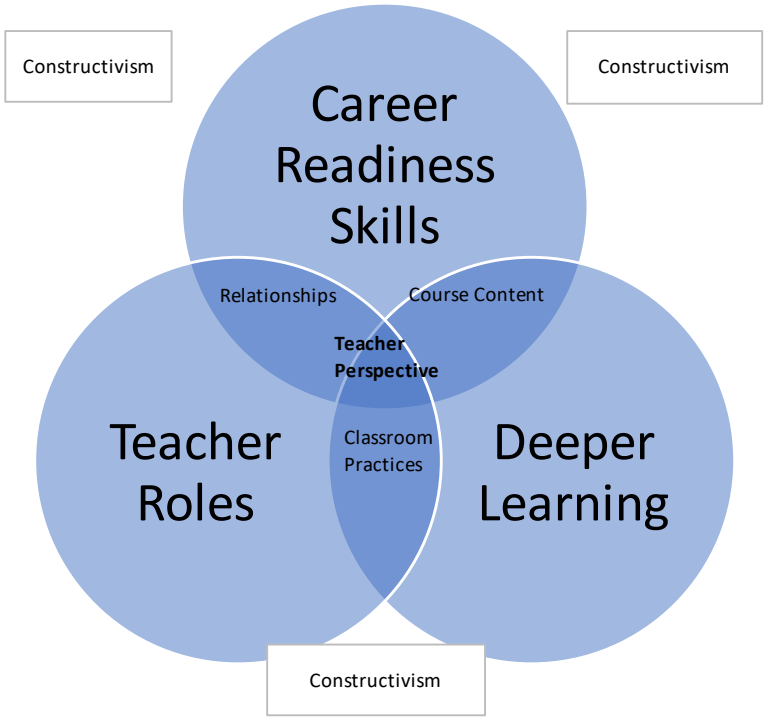

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

Gap in the Literature

Over 30% of schools throughout the United States are in small rural communities, yet less than 6% of research conducted in school has included rural schools (Hadre, Sullivan, & Crowson, 2009). The current study will not only engage in research that will involve one small rural school but also address a gap in literature related to the research of high school teachers' perspective. Teachers have direct experience of the practical significances of our educational policies and practices. They are in a position to identify problems and solutions in our schools that may not have been adequately discussed in the public forum. The new graduation mandates associated with career readiness in Indiana is a topic that has raised some concern across the state. The current study could be used to inform districts regarding teachers' understanding and perspective of this new career readiness skills mandate and their portrayal of how they incorporate these skills into their teaching. Finally, a great deal of research has been done regarding college readiness, but career readiness has been overlooked until recent demands made by employers across the country. This research will help to fill the knowledge gap associated with career readiness as it relates to high school curriculum and post-secondary preparation.

Summary

The literature review examined career readiness and the incorporation of those skills into curricula as a way for teachers to link subject area content while, at the same time providing meaningful learning experiences that develop the skills and knowledge students need for today's modern workforce. The chapter also explored the critical themes and background related to college and career readiness, specifically career readiness, the employability skills framework developed by the US Department of Education, and the conceptual framework that supports student's construction of their own understanding of the world in which they live.

The topic of career readiness skills is at the forefront of many debates around the country; options for implementing these skills are being investigated all around the world. It is the hope of the researcher that the addition of the current research will add value to understanding the lived experiences of teachers embedding the career readiness skills into the content curriculum to prepare students for college or the workforce after graduation in a small rural southern Indiana high school. This study pursues the exploration of the learning experiences through the knowledge and practice of high school teachers as they embed career readiness skills into the content curriculum.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As detailed in chapter two, a significant gap in research exists within the study of incorporating career readiness skills into classroom practices in rural high schools across the country. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore rural high school teachers' perspectives as they incorporate career readiness skills into their classroom practices and explore integrated practices teachers believed foster students' acquisition of career readiness skills. The overall goal is to answer research questions as well as share notable successes in incorporating career readiness skills in content curriculum and suggest how to remove barriers for future implementation.

This chapter describes the research design context, sites and populations, research methods, and considerations. This chapter begins with the research questions that guided my study, followed by a description of my case research design. Then, I describe the study's research context, including setting and participants, along with a rationale for my choices. Next, a description of the data collection procedures, instruments, and methods for analysis are shared. The chapter closes with a discussion of the limitations of my study's methods and my perspective as a researcher.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. How do rural high school teachers incorporate career readiness skills into their classroom practices?
2. What obstacles are faced by rural high school teachers when integrating career readiness skills?

3. What integrated practices do rural high school teachers believe foster students' acquisition of career readiness skills?

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative descriptive case study design to explore the perceptions of high school teachers as they incorporated career readiness skills into classroom practices. A case study is a method of inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context (Yin, 2014). To expound on this description of this method of investigation, a qualitative case study is logical, informational, and grounded in the experiences of people (Yin, 2014). One benefit of qualitative inquiry is that a study's design is emergent and flexible, responsive to changing conditions of the research in progress (Merriam, 1998). The focus of this study was to investigate how the integration of career readiness skills are perceived and/or understood by teachers at River City High School. Case study research was beneficial in this instance because of the nature of the interview process. I was able to adapt the questions and responses to meet the needs of the study. Utilizing a case study also allowed me to recognize the unique or uncommon experiences of teachers at RCHS using the viewpoints and data sources acknowledged in the interviews (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Research Context

River City High School (RCHS) is a pseudonym for the research site selected for the study. River City High School serves the student community in Charlotte County, Indiana, also a pseudonym. The county consists of 306 square miles of land, with multiple small communities scattered throughout the area. The three largest towns include Bright (pseudonym) that has an estimated population of 431, Englewood (pseudonym) with an estimated population of 627, and Venice (pseudonym), the largest of the three towns, with an estimated population of 812.

According to Stats Indiana, the population of the school community served by River City School Corporation is 1711 (2018).

River City High School is considered a rural public school by the Indiana Department of Education with a student population average of 450 (grades 9 through 12). Data from Indiana Department of Education in 2017-18 indicates the enrollment at RCHS is 450 students in grades 9 through 12 with approximately a 50% split between male and female students, a 34.5% pass rate of the ISTEP+ Grade 10 assessment, and a 95.7% graduation rate (2018). The racial and ethnic diversity of the student population has increased from less than one percent to 4.1% in the past three years.

The school year at RCHS consists of one hundred eighty instructional days broken into four nine-week grading periods with progress reports sent home midway through each grading period and grade reports at the end. River City currently operates on a seven-period day with a homeroom period of forty minutes.

The population of the community and the school has a direct impact on both the school climate and course offerings. Students are limited in elective opportunities due to the small population. Steps taken to improve course opportunities include the cooperative agreement between RCHS and River City Vocational School as well as River City Community College, which offers dual credit courses at RCHS. River City Vocational School offers a wide variety of vocational programs of which RCHS students may apply in their sophomore year to attend during their junior and senior years of high school. To meet the educational needs of all students, adaptations to course offerings, assessment strategies, and curriculum alignment are always at the forefront of the corporation's administrators' concerns. As a way to offer opportunities for high ability students, several Advanced Placement and honors classes are now on the master

schedule for students looking to obtain college credits during high school, either through an online source or in class (IDOE, 2017).

The school location for this case study was not random. This location was selected because it is part of the AdvancED Accreditation Commission recognized as a school corporation working to develop a college and career readiness program for students in Kindergarten through twelfth grade. RCHS has been recognized for its outstanding program by the state and National Advance Placement Program. This site was also selected based on size and relative location to a large metropolitan area that offers career and high education opportunities for students.

Research Participants. According to the Indiana Department of Education, RCHS employs 29 full-time corresponding (FTE) core-academic and Career Technical Education (CTE) teachers. Of the 29 teachers, 24 are core-academic teachers, three are fine arts teachers, and two teachers teach career technical education courses. According to the Indiana Department of Education (2018), six teachers have 0 – 5 years of experience; seven teachers have 6 – 10 years of experience; four have 11-15 years of experience, eight teachers have 16 – 20 years of experience and four teachers have 20 + years of experience. Interestingly, over the past five years, the student population has declined by 33%, and the number of teachers has decreased by 38%.

Since the focus of this study was career readiness skills being integrated into content area classes purposeful sampling was used to acquire teachers. The study's teacher participants were those who taught high school core- academic courses (English Language Arts, math, science, or social studies), see table below.

Participant Data

Name	Age (yrs.)	Hometown	Content Area(s)	Yrs. of Experience
Charity	40-50	Nearby county	English	22
Allyson	30-40	RC County	Chemistry	18
Dennis	40-50	RC County	U.S, History/Government	15
Cathy	40-50	Kentucky	Government/Econ/Business	22
Dorothy	40-50	RC County	English	22
Aileen	40-50	Nearby County	Algebra/Math	13
Anne	60+	RC County	English	11
Kris	20-30	RC County	Biology/Chemistry	3
Nicole	30-40	RC County	Spanish	2

Recruitment. Interviewees for this study were identified through a convenience sample, a purposeful sampling strategy because it is geographically and immediately accessible to the researcher (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2014, p. 32). Initial contact was made with the potential teachers at RCHS via work email requesting their voluntary participation in this research. This email introduced the study and informed participants of teacher confidentiality, volunteer rights of the teacher, consent information, teacher withdrawal, whom to contact for concerns or questions, and how their information will remain confidential once the study is complete. Appendix A includes the introductory email.

One way to discern participants was to select those who perform various roles in the building, including teacher, counselor, and administrator. Using the core-academic area teachers' responses to the introductory email, the study's sample did not have to be narrowed to balance

the number of teachers (2 to 3 teachers per content subject area was preferred). An ample number of subject area teachers were represented by those who expressed interest. Teachers who expressed interest in participating in the study and taught in that content area for more than one year were selected. Since a sufficient number of responses from each core academic area were received, teachers were not directly contacted by the researcher or probed to participate in the study.

Consent and Confidentiality. Appendix B includes the informed consent and confidentiality reference letter. Strict safeguards were implemented by the researcher to ensure participant identity and comments were kept confidential. The facility, along with each of the participants, was assigned a random pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and encourage fluid discourse. The data collected has been stored and maintained on my personal device and storage unit. After three years, the data will no longer be valid, therefore, will be destroyed. All documents have been kept in a safe location away from the school site to maintain confidentiality. All documents will be offered to the participants after the study.

Risks and Benefits. There are no risks associated with participating in the study. The researcher met with participants at the time and location of their choice to maximize the participants' comfort level in speaking openly. The entire interview process was designed to solicit the valued viewpoint of each participant without using uncomfortable or challenging modes of communication.

Participation in the study created periphery information for rural high school faculties as high schools in Indiana transition students to fulfill the necessities of the new graduation requirements. Input from teachers can be the catalyst to making changes to district level curriculum that may include the delivery of additional professional development to strengthen

teachers understanding of career readiness and the new mandates. Teachers' input can also help to implement approaches that can eliminate the stressors experienced by future new teachers.

Data Collection

Data collection methods for this descriptive case study included face-to-face open-ended, semi-structured interviews, a face-to-face focus group interview, and an artifact review.

Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine academic teachers providing a degree of uniformity between interviews and also allowing the opportunity for individual responses as well as for probing and clarification (Yin, 2014). The goal of the interviews was to collect rich data about the methods and approaches being used by this rural high school staff to incorporate career readiness skills into the high school content curriculum and classroom practices.

To construct an inclusive understanding of how teachers incorporated career readiness skills into content curriculum, a semi-structured interview protocol was followed; this procedure offered me the flexibility to adjust questions (Jacob & Furgeson, 2012). Prior to the interviews, I obtained permission to record the interviews. Semi-structured interview questions were asked to each participant in a meeting place that best fit the participants' time, date, and location. As noted, teachers' responses were collected through audio recordings and non-verbal cues with participant reactions and interview field notes were written in a journal. The audio files of the 35-60-minute interviews were stored on a secure password protected database. At the conclusion of the study, the audio files were destroyed. Using the recording database allowed me to keep the footages organized, categorized, and available for later access and further note-taking.

The questions presented in the interview protocol served as a general guide as I directed the questions as overall discussion topics, ideas, or comments gave the researcher the flexibility

to ask participants open-ended, clarifying questions (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). After each interview, the I took time to reflect on the experience and recorded further field notes in my journal. The notes captured my opinions about what the interviewee's responses were in relation to my research questions. At that time, I was also able to construct potential follow-up questions (Yin, 2014). Since the notes captured my opinions about what the interviewee stated in relation to my research questions they were dated and tagged to the corresponding interview transcription in the Dedoose database.

The nine teacher interviews focused on their perception of methods and approaches they used to incorporate career readiness skills into their classroom practices and what challenges they face when integrating those skills. Collecting different types of data from more than one source (multiple participants, various responses, and field notes) provided more compelling and robust evidence leading to the prediction of similar or contrasting results (Yin, 2014).

Focus Group Interview. Focus group interviews are used in research to understand better how participants feel or think about an issue, idea, product, or service" (Krueger & Casey, 2015, p. 5). The idea behind the focus group method is "group dynamics can help participants to explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one-to-one interview" (Kitzinger, 1995). Also, focus group interviews allow "group members to influence each other by responding to ideas and questions that may not otherwise be brought out in one-to-one interviews" (Villard, 2003, p. 2). In this case study, one focus group of six volunteer teachers who also participated in the semi-structured interviews was conducted to represent RCMHS teacher perspectives and explore challenges of integrating career readiness skills into teaching practices. As noted earlier, prior to the interviews, I obtained permission to record the interviews. The focus group interview was a conversation around a core set of semi-structured questions that

took place with the group of teachers in an after-school meeting that best fit the participants' schedules (see Appendix G). The group interview lasted 56 minutes and was facilitated by me. Teacher responses were once again collected through the audio recordings and non-verbal cues with participant reactions and field notes written in a journal.

A focus group interview protocol was essential to enable me to construct a holistic understanding relating to the process of incorporating career readiness skills (Krueger, 2015). The focus group protocol provided me with a series of questions and prompts. It was vital for me to ask questions of the group and allow time for participants to respond to each other's comments (CDC, 2008). The questions presented in the focus group interview protocol served as a general guide for me as I took the opportunity to introduce the inquiries as topics, ideas, or comments then moved on to ask supplementary open-ended, clarifying questions (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). After the focus group interview, I took time to reflect on the experiences and recorded further field notes in my journal. The notes captured my opinions about what the interviewee's responses were in relation to my research questions which, proved to be a difficult process due to the number of participants. At that time, I was also able to document potential follow-up questions (Yin, 2014). Since the notes captured my opinions about what the focus group participants stated in relation to my research questions, they were also dated and tagged to the corresponding interview transcription in the Dedoose database.

Artifact Review. Case study evidence can come from many sources (Yin, 2014). In the interviews, I asked participants to provide documentary evidence, including sample lesson plans, course syllabi, and units of study related to career readiness skills. Additionally, teachers were asked to provide documents related to district career readiness skills initiatives, professional development, implementation, and performance standards related to career readiness skills.

Though only five documents were received, the reference to the school website was very helpful in "verifying the correct spelling and titles of names of people and organizations that might have been mentioned in an interview and provided other specific details to corroborate information from other sources" (Yin, 2014, p. 107). These documents also allowed the researcher to become more familiar with the school's integrated initiative as they related to the development of students' career readiness skills.

Data Analysis

In case study research, the process for qualitative analysis of data begins with developing an easy coding system (Hashim, Hashim, & Esa, 2011). First, all information from the semi-structured face-to-face interviews, focus group interviews, and artifact review was transcribed and organized into topics that reflect my research questions. For example, the first research question examined classroom practices, the researcher purposely reviewed the data for such elements related to classroom practices including, evidence of teaching strategies, relationships, lesson planning, classroom organization and reference to fundamental career readiness skills. Additionally, the second research question explored obstacles. The researcher purposely reviewed the data for such elements as relationships, negative comments, lack of student opportunities, and areas identified by teachers as an area of weakness for themselves or their students. The third research question explored integrated practices, the researcher purposely reviewed the data for elements that encompassed the entire school population such as student handbook information, school initiatives, and described positive attributes about the campus. The researcher identified these categories based on the themes that emerged in her literature review.

After completing the initial analysis of documents and transcription, DeDoose, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, was used to uncover common themes from

the research data including the transcriptions, field notes, and artifact information. Next, the researcher conducted a preliminary exploratory analysis of the data by listening to and reading each transcript to obtain a general sense of the data I had collected (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). During this process I added notes and ideas to the transcription pages. Throughout the process of data transcription and analysis, I kept a record of possible follow-up questions, just in case I would need to reach out to the teachers via email or telephone. On two occasions I exchanged emails with participants to propose member checking and to acquire artifact documents. Finally, the researcher re-analyzed the themes on two additional occasions using colored pencils and coding terms. As themes and patterns were identified during this coding phase, I aligned them with the themes and identifiers in the Dedoose database. Aligning the data from my color coding and the Dedoose software allowed me to create "a framework to show what the data reveals given the purpose of the study" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 100). Finally, the framework themes were organized and developed to articulate conclusions and findings of the research within a case study narrative (Yin, 2014). This narrative was constructed and included in Chapters 4 and 5 where the researcher explained the data as it related to the conceptual framework and research questions.

Research Quality

Reliability. Reliability in qualitative research depends on the skill of the researcher and the consistency of his/her approach across different projects (Creswell, 2014). It was essential for me to repeatedly review transcripts along with interview questions, responses, and coding to ensure no mistakes were made during the transcription process.

Validity. Validity in qualitative research determines whether the research truly measures what it is intended to measure or how straightforward are the research results (Golafshani, 2003).

This case study sought to explore the perceptions of core-academic teachers in a rural southern Indiana high school as they incorporated career readiness skills into their classroom practices to prepare students for the demands of future employment. It was important for the researcher to accurately synthesize the data from the face-to-face interviews, focus group interview, and artifact review to reveal the teachers' reality. This process took a significant amount of time for the researcher as I was determined to produce reliable data and themes from the interviews. Because qualitative research is interpretive, it was necessary for the researcher to reflect on my role in the research and how I interpreted the findings (Creswell, 2012).

In qualitative research, validity is one of the strengths based on whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account (Creswell, 2014). It has been important for the researcher to be consistent and precise when looking at the data as it was collected from participants. To ensure validity and trustworthiness of this data, the researcher relied on the code co-occurrence feature within Dedoose as well as my own coding skills. This step was important to ensure that the data collected from the interview participants was systematically reviewed.

Finally, validity is often measured in terms of credibility, the point to which data collection, analysis, and presentation of findings are presented in a thorough and verifiable manner (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). Through the triangulation of data, validity is accomplished. Patton (2001) advocates using multiple sources of data as a means of triangulation by stating, "triangulation strengthens a study by combining multiple sources of data and research methods." In this case study, the used documentation from nine face-to-face interviews, one focus group interview, and district artifacts to strengthen the triangulation of data from the study

Definition of Terms

21st-century skills. A broad set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits that are believed to be critically important to success in today's world, particularly in collegiate programs and contemporary careers and workplaces (Ananiadou, Claro, 2009).

Baby boomer. Classification of a person who was born roughly between the years 1946 and 1964 who share similar values, beliefs, and work ethic with others of a similar age (Veloz, 2010).

College and career readiness. An individual has the knowledge, skills, and abilities to succeed in post-secondary education and economically viable career opportunities (American Institute for Research, n.d.).

Employability skills. A set of essential in-demand skills for all jobseekers regardless of experience or occupation. These skills are crucial to finding employment and succeeding in the workplace. In Indiana, the skills fall into four categories (1) mindsets, (2) learning strategies, (3) social & emotional skills, and (4) work ethic (Indiana Department of Workforce Development, 2019).

Rural schools. The standard NCES definition of "rural," based on Census-defined locales of schools in a district, was used; and "small" isolated districts were those with enrollment averaging fewer than 25 students per elementary grade and fewer than 100 students per secondary grade served (McLaughlin & Others, American Institute for Research, 1997).

Limitations of the Study

Ultimately, no research is perfect, and neither is one single research tool. "Since you cannot prove everything, much less one thing, conclusively, all you can do is set up a strong, logical, and thorough study to analyze your particular topic" (Butin, 2010, p. 108). Narrowing the perspective of participants to educators produced limitations in this study. The perspective of

other stakeholders, including local business owners and parents, were not included. However, these groups went beyond the scope of this study. A second limitation consists of the small sample size of nine teachers, as well as only including one rural high school in the study. This will make it difficult to find significant relationships in the data (Labaree, 2009).

Researcher Perspective

Qualitative research is interpretive, making it necessary for the researcher to reflect on the role I take in the research and how the findings are interpreted (Creswell, 2011). It is important to note that researchers' multiple and varied positions, roles, and identities are intricately and complexly embedded in the process and outcomes of education research (Milner, 2007; Chapman, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2000: Stanley; 2007). My current role as an elementary school administrator would not weigh heavily on the topic of this study, however, over the past four years, my role as an administrator in a rural middle/high school led the researcher to this topic. This study came to fruition while in that role when the district college and career readiness initiative began in 2014 and teachers became aware of the necessity to prepare students for the 21st-century workforce while in their classroom.

Once the researcher began to explore studies related to career readiness and rural schools' concepts related to shortfalls of being rural began to materialize. Study after study described the challenges of students in rural schools including geographic isolation, lack of resources, students' inability to achieve proficiency on state assessments, lack of parent support, and negative influences of outside sources (Parker, 2015; Montgomery, 2010; Bissell 2017). As the current study progressed, the associations of challenges and deficit thinking found in previous studies related to rural schools continued to magnify which may have caused the researcher to be a bit more critical of the participants because my personal and professional belief that teachers are the

force behind the education that offers every student the opportunity to overcome adversities. It has been my belief that embedding career readiness skills into content curriculum would benefit all students by preparing them for the global workforce or post-secondary education, no matter the size or location of the school.

Despite my belief in embedding career readiness skills into the curriculum, it was important to focus my research so that I was not pursuing or advocating for one particular orientation about the implementation of career readiness skills. To check and counteract my biases, I took action through the research process. For example, before conducting the interviews, the interview questions were written to answer my research questions and to reflect my identified constructivist conceptual framework. Yin (2014) suggests researchers become aware of biases and strive for the highest ethical standards while doing research. This study was framed to describe the perspectives of core-academic teachers in rural southern Indiana high schools as they incorporated career readiness skills into their classroom practices to prepare students for the demands of future employment. It was my objective to make an effort to be cognizant of the positionality that could impact the research. This was done by utilizing an interview protocol, focus group protocol, researcher field notes, and data recordings using technology.

Conclusion

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to explore teachers' perceptions as they incorporated career readiness skills into their classroom practices along with the challenges they face in the process. The information gathered in this study can be used to inform future practice and program development. All high schools in Indiana must prepare students for life after graduation. This has been made clear by multiple laws and policies from the past several decades. All teachers have been grappling with the latest iterations of ESSA and Indiana's

response to that federal act. Educators and school leaders must learn more about the work in this area to support more effective implementation of career readiness skills in the future. Additionally, understanding how this process is unfolding for rural teachers is critical, as we know that their students have more limited job prospects in the 21st-century global marketplace than their nonrural peers. The more educators can learn about how career readiness is understood and applied in rural high schools, the better we can support positive changes.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore rural high school teachers' experiences as they implemented career readiness skills into their teaching practices. As noted in the literature review, a one-size-fits-all approach to preparing students for our knowledge economy does not work (Baker, 2013). Therefore, the overall goals of this study were to share notable successes and challenges related to the incorporation of career readiness skills into classroom practices. The findings are based on the collection and analysis of data from nine individual teacher interviews, as well as one focus group interview comprised of six teachers who also partook in the individual interviews. In addition, an analysis of artifacts from River City High School, a rural southern Indiana high school was undertaken.

For clarity, the findings are organized by themes within each research question. During the first research question, examining how teachers incorporate career readiness skills, three themes emerged: *constructivist student-centered approach*, *teacher-centered approach*, and *relational practices.* Specific teaching methods define these approaches. The second question in this study examined the obstacles rural high school teachers encountered when integrating career readiness skills into classroom practices. In the interviews, teachers described the unique obstacles faced when teaching in a rural high school setting. Three themes that surfaced from the interview data as obstacles were *elements of a rural school, deficit thinking,* and *professional challenges for rural high school teachers*. The third research question examined integrated practices RCHS teachers believed fostered high school students' acquisition of career readiness skills. The theme that emerged from the analysis of data, including artifacts, was *integrated practices*. Integrated practices included school-wide learning experiences, both social

and academic, created by the administrators, teachers, and support staff that inspire students to grow academically, develop career readiness skills, and gain competencies that are necessary to become productive members of society.

The chapter is organized into three primary sections with detailed explanations of descriptive data as it relates to the research questions. Findings from the one-to-one teacher interviews, focus group interview, and analysis of artifacts are expounded upon in each of the sections. By organizing the findings this way, readers can understand the depth of findings and consider the relationship between instructional practices and relational practices as they relate to incorporating career readiness skills into classroom practices. These findings describe the story of River City High School classroom teachers' perceptions of implementing career readiness skills into classroom practices, obstacles that got in the way of the implementation, and teachers' perception of integrated practices that moved students forward in their knowledge and development of career readiness skills.

Incorporating Career Readiness Skills

The first research question examined the methods teachers used to incorporate career readiness skills into their teaching practices. In describing their teaching methods, participants expounded upon three distinct themes, constructivist student-centered approaches, teacher-centered approaches, and relational practices as approaches to incorporating career readiness skills. In the one-to-one interviews and focus group interview, classroom teachers described methods including modeling, group work, utilization of teachable moments, and exposing students to opportunities. Teachers perceived that these practices moved students forward in their knowledge and development of career readiness skills. Besides instructional methods, relational practices also emerged. Teachers shared their thoughts regarding the value of building

interpersonal relationships with students as a way to cultivate career readiness skills in the classroom. Teachers shared that they fostered relationships with and among their students through classroom interactions, sharing personal background information, and growing personal connections. Every teacher, no matter if their approach were student-centered or teacher-centered, believed relational practices were of the utmost importance when it came to incorporating career readiness skills.

Constructivist Student-Centered Approach

When discussing how teachers included career readiness skills into their classroom practices, the first theme that emerged was that of a constructivist student-centered approach. Four teachers interviewed (Allyson, Kris, Nicole, and Cathy) believed a student-centered approach allowed them to easily incorporate career readiness skills into their classroom practices by having students co-develop classroom procedures, developing engaging lessons, and providing diverse assignments. Two additional teachers, Charity and Dorothy, also, at times, described how they utilized student-centered approaches in their teaching practices but at other times shared teacher-centered approaches. Therefore, they are mentioned in both student-centered and teacher centered sections. In one instance, during the focus group interview, when teachers were discussing collaboration activities that took place in their classrooms, both Charity and Dorothy described a very student-centered collaborative environment. Charity described a time in class when students worked together to edit and write. She explained how positive and academic the conversation was during that time. Dorothy also expressed a positive collaborative activity she completed with students.

In this study, student-centered referred to the teachers' instructional methods where students are deeply engaged and co-directing the learning process. In the classroom, the teacher

acts as a facilitator of the learning process while students follow guidelines and procedures created by fellow classmates, then work independently or collaborate with each other to complete standards-based tasks, think critically, and take responsibility for their learning.

In the classroom, student-centered teachers acted as facilitators of instruction to provide a short mini-lesson, then providing students with multiple learning opportunities that allowed them to complete independent or collaborative assignments related to the content and standards. Students who struggled to follow classroom norms created by the group were privately reminded of the rules and might even be asked to model expectations. Allyson, Kris, Nicole, and Cathy along with Charity believed this type of classroom environment offered them the best opportunity to teach and model career readiness skills including time management, organization, and conflict management.

Providing a student-centered classroom and becoming a facilitator of learning, instead of a provider of information, was a gradual process and took multiple years for the teacher to develop. As a veteran English teacher, Charity, noted:

> Initially, I provided them with essential instructions, then followed up with guidance and feedback, leading students to think critically and solve complex problems. Eventually, students would explore project options on their own or work collaboratively with peers so they could not only obtain information or new knowledge but master core content and develop an academic mindset.

During the focus group interview, Allyson, Kris, Nicole, and Cathy remained student-centered when describing how they incorporated career readiness skills by facilitating their students' information gathering skills, written communication skills, and increasing their ability to provide adequate evidence, all of which are career readiness skills. These teachers described

how they placed a strong emphasis on the teacher-student relationship. In multiple instances Allyson, Kris, Nicole, and Cathy, described their classrooms as "an open environment where there is less emphasis on teacher-led instruction and more prominence on both the student and teacher experiencing the learning process together," stated Kris. Teachers who worked to develop a student-centered classroom shared that the teacher heavily guided student learning during the first nine weeks of school then lessened the teacher guidance as the year progressed. By the end of the year, teachers would step back and merely guide students as they explored career readiness skills and engaged in personal learning opportunities.

Instructional Practices. During the interviews, Allyson, Kris, Nicole, Cathy, and Charity communicated the significance of particular instructional practices they felt held significant value in a student-centered classroom as they incorporated career readiness skills. By instructional practices, teachers meant specific teaching methods that are used to direct interactions in the classroom and advance students in their learning. Common instructional strategies included modeling, utilization of teachable moments, engaging students in group work, and exposing students to opportunities outside the classroom. All are methods RCHS teachers used to integrate career readiness skills into classroom instruction.

Teacher Modeling. One particular practice included modeling for students. During the one-to-one interviews, teachers described the process they went through to demonstrate skills and strategies, both academic and related to the workplace, that students would need as they progressed to the next stage of life. In one instance, Kris, the youngest teacher on staff, described how she modeled for students how they should work collaboratively and share information with each other online.

> We use Google, so I pulled up a blank document and started typing the information they needed for class. Then I shared the document with a couple of students and asked them to begin typing information from their book at the same time. That way, everyone could see and understand what was happening.

Kris added, "The ability to be able to work together online will help them in college or the workforce." This instructional method of modeling allowed students to learn by observing and mimicking the teacher's processes, which, in itself, is a career readiness skill.

During the one-to-one interview, Allyson spoke and placed great emphasis on modeling for her students. She shared that she gives her students 100 percent of herself. "Every day, I model how important it is to be ready, even when I am frustrated. I always have lessons organized and have supplemental materials prepared ahead of time." She added, "I show them I will give you everything I have and question, how can they not give that back to me?"

Allyson's modeling offered students the opportunity to observe the steps and skills she used daily to prepare for class then presented them the opportunity to reflect on career readiness skills they need to apply to classroom activities and make connections to their learning.

Utilize Teachable Moments. Allyson, Kris, Nicole, Cathy, and Charity shared multiple occasions when a teachable moment would arise, or an unplanned opportunity arose during class for them to offer students real-world insight into career readiness. Examples from the teachers were specific to real workforce situations, lessons, and stories. In one instance a student asked Kris about going to technical college, so she talked about her brothers' experience,

> My brother has some degree through a technical college that he picked up while he was waiting for a spot in the elevators union to open. Now, he has a 2-year degree and is in the elevator union. Plus, he has already made more money in under a year than I have in the last

three years I've been teaching here. It is just absolutely a wonderful position. He will make over $100,000 a year by the time he gets through the first five years of his career.

Kris continued by saying, "those kids really listened to my story, and now my brother comes in when he can to talk to them. They love it!" Charity shared an off-handed teachable moment she had in her classroom,

> One day I overheard a girl talk about her struggle at work with another employee whom she is required to work closely with, someone she didn't like. This discussion created a great conversation for everyone in our class. It was an excellent opportunity for all of the students to offer alternatives for handling the situation and learn from each other.

The teachers felt that the information they were able to share with students during those teachable moments regarding career readiness and skills needed to perform jobs was invaluable to students, especially students who may not be aware of occupations they do not see every day. These conversations open students' eyes to prospective employment and make them aware of professions that may appeal to their skillset.

Engage Students in Group Work. An instructional practice emphasized by Allyson, Kris, Nicole, Cathy, and Charity during the interview process was engaging students in group work. They perceived group work as an instructional method that encouraged students to participate in active learning, develop critical thinking, communication, and decision-making skills, all of which, Ann pointed out, are career readiness skills. Cathy explained why group work is important,

> In my class, we do a lot of group activities because I know employers say, you know, we can educate them, we can teach them, but they need the skills to interact with others. They need to be able to work with one another, and they need to show up for work on time.

Charity shared that she uses group work with her first-period class,

> We do a lot of working together, working in small groups, partner work because this class is not good at appropriately communicating with each other, and they have to be able to do that in a work environment.

Whether or not Charity teaches specific group work skills was unclear, and no description of the process was shared during the interview process.

Expose Students to Opportunities. Allyson, Kris, and Cathy shared stories of multiple occasions when they exposed small groups of students to employers and career exploration opportunities as a way to incorporate career readiness skills into their classroom practices. These small group lessons fostered student knowledge of career choices or opportunities so they could build connections with professionals outside their everyday community network of family, friends, and teachers. Cathy explained,

> In February, we took a small group of seniors to different union halls to learn more and find out how their apprenticeship program worked. We also took the kids to the carpenters' union facility and electrical union hall in the city, as well as their training facilities, so the kids could see what actually happened during the day. This trip also allowed kids the opportunity to speak with the foremen and leaders there about potential jobs and what they need to do to be hired in the future. The kids came back to school, all fired up and ready to go! They were able to make a connection between what we are doing in class and what the employees were doing on the job.

Student-centered teachers believed teacher modeling, utilizing teachable moments, engaging students in group work, and exposing students to career opportunities and various employers promoted the reflection and association of career readiness skills they have learned in

the classroom with real-world work environments which empower students to be better prepared for the workforce upon graduation, if they so desire.

Teacher-Centered Approach

The second theme to emerge from discussions of classroom instructional practices revealed a teacher-centered approach. Three teachers interviewed, Dennis, Ann, and Aileen believed this approach allowed them to incorporate career readiness skills into their classroom practices through a structured, teacher-led process. Once again, it must be noted that Charity and Dorothy, at times, described how they utilized teacher-centered approaches in their teaching practices but at other times shared student-centered approaches. Therefore, they are mentioned in both student-centered and teacher centered sections. Both Charity and Dorothy's descriptions of their classroom led the researcher to believe the majority of their instruction was teacher-centered because classroom instruction was intentionally planned out and centered around Indiana State Standards. Charity admitted, "I know the students are getting the material they need to pass the ISTEP, and that is what is important." Dorothy commented on classroom structure and work time when classroom activities were carried out in a quiet, organized manner with students working most of the time independently. Dorothy presumed, the independence led the student to make their own decisions and complete tasks in a way that was successful for them, all of which lead to the growth of career readiness skills.

At RCHS, a teacher-centered approach seemed to refer to lecture, where the teacher gathers and provides information for students, then delivers the information via classroom lectures while, at the same time, students listen and take notes. In the teacher-centered classroom, students follow guidelines and procedures generated by the teacher, then complete independent, well-thought-out assignments based on standards, also designed and created by the teacher.

In a teacher-centered classroom, the teacher is responsible for fostering classroom activities and decisions related to incorporating career readiness skills into classroom practices. In this type of classroom, the teachers provide lecture-type instruction for students as well as delivers guidelines and procedures regarding classroom activities and lessons. If students in a teacher-centered classroom encountered performance problems or are unable to follow the classroom policies or procedures, the teacher privately converses with the individual student to deliver an explanation for the wrong-doing then holds the student accountable in a manner similar to an imagined local business identified by teachers. Dennis, Aileen, Anne, and Dorothy believed creating a teacher-centered classroom, where policies and procedures are carried out in a manner that resembles their perception of a work environment, is the best way to teach and model career readiness skills in the classroom. The descriptions the three teachers provided of their classroom environment positions them as the central supplier of information, with lessons focused on standards and testing guidelines. These teachers shared how they follow a lesson plan, often referring students to notes-taking, assignments in textbooks or workbooks instead of using alternative methods of teaching and learning to achieve mastery of the standards. They also shared they do not directly teach career readiness skills but incorporated them into their lessons. Additionally, the teachers focused on classroom management, teacher modeling, utilization of teachable moments, dissemination of information, and enforcement of policies and procedures to teach.

Instructional Practices. During the interviews, Dennis, Aileen, and Anne shared particular instructional practices they felt stood out in their classroom. By instructional practices, teachers meant specific teaching methods that are used to direct interactions in the classroom and advance students in their learning. Methods included an emphasis on classroom management, teacher

modeling, utilization of teachable moments, dissemination of information, and enforcement of policies and procedures.

Emphasis on Classroom Management. Dennis, Aileen, Anne, and Dorothy assumed a position of inspiration within the classroom due to their level of knowledge and position of influence in the building. These teachers utilized classroom management and expertise to run traditional classrooms that focused more on policies and compliance than mutual respect and collegiality. There were multiple comments made by teachers in the interviews that provided evidence that led to the assumption that students were perceived as the receptors of knowledge and information, instead of collaborators in their learning process. Dorothy was direct in her response,

> I have immediate consequences in my class for juniors and seniors who are negligent. Instead of waiting until the end of the grading period, I address them right away. For example, if our weekly agenda is on the board when they enter the classroom, the students' first task is to figure out what assignments they may have missed, or which task do they not understand. At that point, they need to ask a classmate before approaching me with a question. In short, I am the third person they should question for guidance.

Dorothy pointed out. "We have to foster self-responsibility more than we did twenty years ago when I first started teaching, kids need to understand the notion, you are responsible for you."

Ann offered personal insight into the logic behind the integration of career readiness skills into her overall classroom management. She explained,

> My husband is in charge of around 150 people at work, and there are times when he comes home talking about the skills his employees struggle with, including attendance, verbal and written communication, and tardiness. When I teach my students about the classroom

> expectations, those are the skills I think about first, and I explain to them how I know those skills are essential. They have to come to class ready to work. You are in your seat, prepared to work. Your backpack is empty, your Chromebook has power and on, and you are prepared to learn. I explain to them if they show up to work unprepared, they will be fired.

Ann believed it was important for students to learn those necessary career readiness skills. She then expressed the responsibility teachers have to hold them accountable when they do not exhibit the skills.

Teacher Modeling. During the interviews, Dennis, Aileen, Anne, and Charity communicated the importance of modeling for students. They shared classroom and individual demonstrations they have engaged in with the students, explicitly modeling how students should access, acquire, and comprehend information. Teacher-centered teachers believed that this instructional method worked well for breaking down skills into small manageable segments so students could align the tasks with career readiness. In these instances, teachers took their time to break down the lesson and model each step for the students. When teachers utilized modeling in this way, it allowed students to develop career readiness skills by observing and imitating the teacher's processes. Teachers believed that this instructional method allowed students to acquire career readiness skills by observing and imitating the teacher's processes. Charity shared one instance of modeling for the students that took place in her classroom last school year,

> I put my personal college assignment on the board to explain transition writing. The students were eager to proofread and edit my mistakes, and to highlight the transition sentence I used to get my point across. They were also shocked to learn that I received a B on the paper.

Modeling provided students with the opportunity to observe a professional in action. Charity also pointed out, “The kids need to learn the proper vocabulary and process for editing, which are both career readiness skills students will need as they move into the workforce.”

Modeling for students allowed teachers to exhibit and demonstrate the inclusion of career readiness skills they have taught in class. In turn, teacher modeling offered students the opportunity to observe career readiness skills being effectively used in real-time and allowed them to make connections to their learning.

Utilize Teachable Moments. Dennis, Aileen, and Anne shared multiple occasions when an unplanned opportunity arose during class for them to offer students real-world insight. Examples from the teachers were specific to real workforce situations, lessons, and stories. Teacher-centered teachers took advantage of this opportunity to be honest and candid with students, even when the students did not want to hear what the teacher has to say. When a student in Aileen’s math class said, “I’m never going to use this” she responded with a scenario similar to one she found herself in when she was a teenager and thought the same thing,

> I worked in my parents’ woodworking factory. I had to go to training to learn how to run a computerized REC mill. It was a million-dollar global project, so I spent hours and hours learning how to set up and use the machine correctly. Do you think I know how to use that machine today? No, but I had to learn at the time. That’s where we are in this class. I need to be able to teach you something, and you apply it to what you are striving for right now, graduation. She went on to say, “Conversations like this take place weekly in my class. I need them to know what to expect when they leave here and go to work.”

Teachable moments allowed the teachers to capitalize on the pop-up opportunities that arose during class to increase or expand the student's learning as it related to the connection between classroom activities and career readiness skills.

Dissemination of Information. Dennis, Aileen, and Anne indicated their job was to be a resource for students as they acquire information, answer problematic questions, offer feedback, then delegated work to students who then, in turn, engaged in completing classroom tasks or assignments. These teachers felt juniors and seniors in high school needed to take initiative and ownership of their work as well as make every effort to be self-reliant and independent problem-solvers. All three teachers believed those were career readiness skills students would be expected to demonstrate when they move into the workforce. Aileen shared her obligation to follow specific math standards and curriculum, as well as, create a well-thought-out environment to ensure her students pass state-wide standardized testing and obtain skills they will need later.

> Most of the students in my Algebra II class are doing what they need to do to acquire a Core 40 diploma, and it's my responsibility to give them the information and skills they need to pass! I try to cover every priority standard and make sure students can complete the problems so they can pass the test. I also need them to do well so I can be rated an effective teacher which is a whole other conversation. I do incorporate career readiness skills like decision-making, information gathering, and problem-solving into class. Since it's a math class, I admit I spend a significant amount of time talking about the problem solving skills because the students struggle with it. I try to relay the content in a way they can use in other areas of their life. Sometimes they understand the relationship, and sometimes they do not, but that goes along with being a teenager.

Teachers who are teacher-centered believe that disseminating information to students encourages them to take ownership of their learning, become independent problem solvers, and self-reliant learners. This is believed, by teacher-centered instructors, to be an effective way to cultivate career readiness skills in the classroom. The researcher must note, teachers who centered learning through themselves, however, did not indicate that they directly taught students these self-reliance or independence skills. Instead, they just expected it from students in a "sink-or-swim manner."

Enforce Policies and Procedures. Dennis, Aileen, Anne, and Charity considered ensuring school and classroom policies and procedures are followed is of primary importance. "Policies and procedures are intended to keep our classrooms and school safe," stated Dennis during the focus group interview; "And in my classroom, I require students to follow them." He ended the testimony with, "There should never be a policy or procedure that does not have a purpose." Charity agreed.

> One of my pet peeves is attendance. We have a school-wide policy in place to ensure students come to school on time, and we, as classroom teachers, should follow through with those designated attendance policies and procedures in the classroom. However, I do not believe every teacher does this with fidelity, which leads to inconsistencies throughout the building, and the students are aware of them, which poses problems for those of us who hold them accountable.

Dennis added, "We have to teach our students how to follow policies, like attendance, by holding them accountable now so they will not lose a job later because they could not show up to work on time." Dennis, Charity, and Aileen shared in the belief that students who do not follow the attendance policies in high school may struggle to follow the attendance policy in the workforce.

The group did not share or discuss school-wide attendance incentives that may be in place to encourage students to attend school regularly that also aligns with workforce attendance policies during the one-on-one interviews but did share the value of the PBIS model during the focus group interview.

Teacher-centered teachers believed the application of instructional practices, including an emphasis on classroom management, teacher modeling, utilization of teachable moments, dissemination of information, and enforcement of policies and procedures, provided students with a direction in the development of career readiness skills similar to that of a workplace environment. Teachers also believed these instructional practices cultivated career readiness skills because students were encouraged to take ownership of their learning, become independent problem solvers, and self-reliant learners.

Relational Practices

A third theme emerged with a significant overlap between teaching pedagogy and relational practices eminent in this study. All nine teachers, whether they used student-centered or teacher-centered teaching methods, shared the value of building interpersonal relationships with students as they worked to develop career readiness skills. Relational practices referred to teacher actions and approaches that established and maintained the growth of interpersonal relationships between the teacher and students so students would benefit from the acquisition and development of the career readiness skills that are needed to be successful in school and in their future professions.

Throughout the interview process, it was clear that all nine teachers worked consciously with their students to cultivate interpersonal relationships, relationships that would foster educational success both inside the classroom and outside. All teachers, regardless of classroom

protocols, pointed out relational practices held significant value in rural high school classrooms. In this study, relational practices refer to teacher actions and approaches that established and maintained the growth of interpersonal relationships between the teacher and students that benefit students' acquisition and development of skills that will need to be successful in school and their future careers. Interpersonal attributes, such as trust, benevolence, and honesty, were used to build unpretentious connections with the students at RCHS. The analysis of data from all nine teachers revealed that sharing personal background information and cultivating classroom interactions were of utmost importance for cultivating a positive educational relationship between teachers and students.

Teachers at RCHS shared how valuable it is to grow personal relationships and show interest in a student outside of the day's instruction and assignments in order to recognize them as whole people. Three teachers reported they try to take the first few minutes of class to connect personally with students. They engaged in casual conversation, asking them about their day and what plans they may have for the evenings or weekends. Kris reflected why she felt this time for discussion was so valuable,

> The information I gather from these casual conversations helps me get to know my students and helps me to build a relationship with them, so they know I care about their educational journey. Sometimes, students just stop by my classroom to talk about what is going on at home or even at work.

Allyson also shared this point of view as she explained,

> I firmly believe no matter what it is I'm trying to teach my students whether it's employ-ability skills or chemistry, it starts with a relationship and from day one, I worked really

> hard to take 30 seconds to two minutes with every student early in the year to build that relationship so they know I believe in them and I am their biggest fan.

The growth and development of positive interpersonal relationships, according to the interviewees, made the students feel more at ease and willing to work in the classrooms where they felt comfortable. This relationship, in turn, offered teachers the opportunity to embed career readiness skills into their daily routine because they knew their students understood the value of learning those skills.

Sharing Personal Background Information. Six out of the nine of the teachers (Dennis, Cathy, Allyson, Anne, Aileen, and Nicole) at RCHS shared that they are from River City County, they attended the local elementary school, grew up down the road, and even attended RCHS as a student. In these circumstances, they shared a bond with students that other teachers in the building may not have. In the interviews, they pointed out this was a valuable position to have with students. Allyson moved to River City County when she was five and spent all of her educational years in the River City school system. She wanted to offer information to the students that no one shared with her; "I see myself in my students when I was their age. I try to share with them there's a big, bad world out there, but it offers amazing opportunities. Let me show you what else is out there besides what you see here."

Allyson added, "because they know me, my family, and they know that I grew up here, some of them actually listen to me, especially when I try to teach them skills they are going to need down the road like how to communicate with others who may not be from River City County and how to manage their time outside of school so they can be effective in their jobs."

Kris, the youngest teacher on staff, also shared her story of growing up in River City County. She reflected on her childhood for a moment,

> My dad struggled through school and worked multiple jobs to make sure we had food on the table and a roof over our heads. He made sure we had what we needed and always told my mom his kids were going to get an education. I want my kids to be successful. We talk about career options because I want them to know there are a lot of choices out there that I didn't even know about, and I'm not that much older than them. The kids listen to me because I am so close to their age, they know I care, and they know that I grew up here.

Dennis and Aileen also share a bond with students that others in the building may not have. In the interviews, they pointed out this was a valuable position to have with students, especially when it came to teaching them skills they would need after high school. Dennis revealed that he related to the students as far as parental and community expectations go. He also shared that he had an understanding of the community dynamics because he was born and raised there,

> In general, teaching in a rural area is different than teaching in say, Franklin County, or any other suburban area where kids have different hobbies and problems than the kids from River City County, and since I grew up there, I get it, and they trust that I understand. They also trust that I will help them out any way I can, whether it is filling out a job application or fixing a flat tire in the parking lot.

Sharing personal background information with students allowed teachers to cultivate a personal connection with the students that enhanced their teaching of the career readiness skills because students knew the teachers understood where they were coming from and what skills they needed to develop so they can successfully move forward after high school.

Cultivating Classroom Interactions. All participants agreed, the classroom was a place for students to acquire new skills and knowledge they would need to develop confidence, self-discipline, problem-solving, and collaboration skills. It is important for teachers to provide

students with a learning environment and opportunities that encouraged everyone, including the teacher, to engage in open and sustained dialog. Charity shared her story that in high school, one of her teachers changed her outlook on education and career when he challenged her way of thinking, which, in turn, encouraged her to do the same with her students.

> It wasn't until my junior year of high school that he challenged my thought process, and I considered it a wonderful thing. It made me think that I'm going to be one of the teachers that get those students that almost fall through the cracks to think about things and try to do more; try to give them opportunities to share and learn, you know, challenge them because they have never been challenged or made to feel they could do more than what their parents did.

Both Dennis and Charity had common student interactions and expectations for their classrooms. Their idea of engagement may look different than the other teachers, but students are expected to complete tasks, assignments, and assessments. Both teachers believed their teaching style would cultivate students who were confident, adaptable, and self-disciplined, all career-ready skills. Charity affirmed,

> My students have to be prepared to move to the next phase of life with confidence, and I believe the interactions in my classroom, as well as my teaching practices and expectations, cultivate those types of skills. I want the students to be ready for whatever they face next, whether it's work or college.

All teachers, whether they used student-centered or teacher-centered teaching methods, shared the value of building interpersonal relationships with students as they worked to develop career readiness skills through classroom practices. All nine teachers believed sharing personal background information and cultivating classroom interaction were key constituents in the

development of students confidence, self-discipline, problem-solving, and collaboration skills, which are all career readiness skills that can be advanced and refined in the classroom as long as interpersonal relationships are established between the teacher and the students.

Summary

When examining how teachers incorporated career readiness skills into their classroom, three themes emerged from the data; a constructivist student-centered approach, a teacher centered approach, and relational practices. Four teachers interviewed (Allyson, Kris, Nicole, and Cathy) believed a student-centered approach allowed them to easily incorporate career readiness skills into their classroom practices by modeling both academic and workplace skills, utilizing teachable moments to offer real-world insight, engaging students in collaborative group work, and exposing students to employers and career exploration opportunities. In the classroom, the student-centered teacher acted as a facilitator of the learning process while students followed guidelines and procedures created by fellow classmates, then working independently or collaborating to take responsibility for their learning and development of career readiness skills.

Three teachers interviewed (Dennis, Aileen, and Anne) believed a teacher-centered approach allowed them to incorporate career readiness skills into their classroom practices they emphasized on classroom management, modeled structured teacher-led lectures where the teacher disseminated information while students listened and followed guidelines and procedures generated by the teacher, and lastly, enforced purposeful policies and procedures in the classrooms that mirrored that of a work environment. These teachers believed the inclusion of these approaches would lead to students' acquisition and refinement of the skills they would need to be successful in the workplace.

Two teachers interviewed (Charity and Dorothy) displayed characteristics of both the student-centered and teacher-centered approaches, therefore their responses emerged in both sections. Both teachers believed facilitating learning; instead of providing information, utilizing teachable moments, and engaging students in group work, provided students the opportunity to acquire career readiness skills in their classrooms. Consequently, both Charity and Dorothy revealed how structured classroom management and teacher modeling worked well for breaking down skills into small learnable segments in their classrooms. Charity and Dorothy each described a combination of practices that worked well for them as they incorporated career readiness skills into their classroom practices.

Student-centered and teacher-centered approaches allow teachers to incorporate career readiness skills into their classroom practices. The methods for doing so are different in that student-centered teachers facilitate the learning. There are times when the classroom can seem unstructured and the teacher is moving around the room managing all of the classroom activities, modeling lessons. A teacher-centered classroom teacher approaches the modeling in a very different manner. The teacher breaks down skills into small learnable segments so students could align the tasks. Another difference was how student-centered and teacher-centered teachers utilize teachable moments. Teacher-centered teachers used this opportunity to be honest and candid with students, even when they may not want to hear what the teacher has to say. Student-centered teachers were not quite as blunt.

Also noteworthy from the study was how RCHS teachers worked to build relationships, maximize learning, and ensure students have the skills they need to move to the next stage of life. All nine teachers interviewed expressed the value of developing an interpersonal relationship with their students to enhance the incorporation of career readiness skills into the

classroom practices. Utilization of relational practices, including sharing personal background information and cultivating classroom interactions, allowed teachers to foster and encourage students' acquisition and development of career readiness skills they believe students will need to be successful in school and their future careers.

Obstacles to Integrating Career Readiness Skills into Classroom Practices

The second research question examined the challenges faced by rural high school teachers when they integrate career readiness skills into teaching practices. Three distinct themes arose from the face-to-face interviews and the focus group interview. The first theme, *elements of rural schools,* addressed the unique social structures and circumstances that influence a rural high school. These elements, in particular, referenced the circumstances that the teachers believed obstructed the implementation of career readiness skills into their classroom practices. The second theme, *deficit thinking*, described the teachers' beliefs that actions and activities outside the classroom, over which the teachers have no control, are the cause for the students' inability to develop career readiness skills or achieve success. Deficit thinking allowed teachers to justify inaction on students' behalf. All participants used deficit thinking to explain students' failures or lack of success at school. The third theme that evolved from the data was *teacher professional challenges due to isolation*. Teacher professional isolation focused on the challenges teachers faced by being isolated from other like-minded professionals and why the separation made it challenging to improve professionally. Teachers were challenged to obtain knowledge related to trending teaching strategies and incorporating career readiness skills into classrooms.

Elements of Rural Schools

Rural schools face unique challenges when it comes to educating students, and RCHS is not unique. Challenges identified by the teacher participants included geographic isolation, transportation barriers, absence of cultural diversity, and lack of fiscal/physical resources. Teachers in rural areas find it challenging to offer learning experiences that coincide with career readiness skills because the school is far from industrial areas or places of employment that provide students hands-on experiences. As Cathy explained, "We talk about these skills every day, but it's pointless if the kids do not have the opportunity to view or practice them and because we are so rural here, that's hard to do. They need to see these skills in action." Other teachers also offered insight into additional challenges associated with rural schools.

Geographic Isolation. Geographic isolation was the first obstacle described by teachers during the interview process. Geographic isolation, in this study, referred to the distance from a city or urban area. RCHS is located more than 25 miles from a metropolitan area. During the interviews, teachers explained that the distance and location of the community made it difficult for students to explore part-time job possibilities, training options, and career-related events. Aileen expressed her concerns for students regarding geographic isolation as it related to the new career pathway mandate for high school graduation,

> Our community is so far-removed from career opportunities the kids should consider. I mean, look at West Alec, that is a growing area with every type of industry you can imagine, but our kids cannot get there to explore the options because it's so far away and they cannot afford the gas to get there.

Despite this, Cathy responded,

> these new graduation requirements have given me the justification I need to take kids on field trips to businesses that offer apprenticeships, work-based learning, or job

> opportunities that could be available to them if they have the means to get there and desire to work outside River City County.

During the focus group interview, all six of the teachers (Dennis, Cathy, Charity, Anne, Kris, and Nicole) agreed, the field trips to employment organizations within one hour of RCHS allowed students to observe and engage in real-life scenarios related to available careers. Cathy explained, "This is why we do what we do in the classroom, why we push students to be on time, work together, take the initiative, and pay attention to details." Classroom activities related to career readiness skills that students would observe and practice on the trip would be completed before the employment organizations visit and upon return from these field trips. Cathy shared that she repeatedly created classroom activities where students had to make connections between work and school. The field trips were generally a culminating activity that tied the two together.

Transportation Barriers. In rural high schools, lack of transportation impacted the ability of students to participate in activities, including after school tutoring services, work-based learning, and extracurricular activities. Three teachers described the transportation conditions at RCHS as dismal. Allyson reflected, "Some juniors and seniors do not even have a driver's license. It's expensive to take driver's education and even more expensive to own a car. How will they ever be able to get a job or explore job opportunities." Dorothy added,

> You have to drive to go anywhere here, you know. You have to drive at least 30 minutes in any direction to go to a fast-food restaurant, which makes it difficult for kids who do not have a reliable vehicle or can't afford the gas. We see that a lot.

The inability for students to be able to explore nearby communities made it problematic for teachers in the classroom to discuss potential job opportunities and work-ready skills with them.

However, it did open a chance to talk about driving and the importance of obtaining a driver's license. Dennis stated,

> Those conversations are difficult ones to have, but it is our responsibility to let them know how valuable that piece of paper is. We have to help those kids persevere through an awkward situation, and they are better for it. Those are specific instances where we use tough conversations to teach independence and career readiness skills to kids.

Teachers shared that transportation barriers have been problematic for years and continue to influence the opportunities for students to observe and utilize the career readiness skills teachers work so hard to cultivate in the classrooms.

Absence of Cultural Diversity. Another obstacle cited by teachers, when integrating career readiness skills in a rural high school, was the absence of cultural diversity. Students at RCHS are 98% white, so they do not have an opportunity to work collaboratively with students from racial and ethnic groups or cultures and languages different than their own, nor has there been a multicultural education program infused into the curriculum. Teachers felt the inability for students to interact with other cultural, racial-ethnic groups made it difficult to prepare students for life outside of River City County or for a global workforce that requires individuals to work with others in heterogeneous groups. This topic came to the forefront of a conversation during the focus group interview. Dorothy, a veteran teacher, has a daughter who went to Indiana University last summer for an introduction into the Groups program, a program for students from underrepresented groups. First, Dorothy shared that her daughter was able to be a part of the Groups program because of their low-income status. She continued the story by recounting her daughter's struggles to make connections with students who came from very different cultural

backgrounds, “Though she could make friends with a rock, Jessa struggled to fit in when she left for Groups last summer.”

Charity added: “Not every kid could make it in that type of environment, I think about a few of our students who are shyer and haven’t been out in the world very much, they didn’t play team sports… they would struggle to fit in somewhere else.”

All nine teachers agreed on the experience of interacting with other ethnic groups and cultures was a valuable lesson for students. They believed that because of the racial make-up of the RCHS community, it was challenging to engage students in activities where they have to be conscious and respectful of people with religious, social, and cultural backgrounds different from their own. Teachers recognized that students did not have experience with people outside of their isolated, white, rural community. Teachers also admitted that their school culture and programming ignored their lack of expertise, consequently making it difficult to incorporate this invaluable career readiness skill into their classroom practices.

Lack of Fiscal/Physical Resources. During the focus group interview, the six teachers discussed the building-level changes that have taken place over the past few years, leading to the elimination of positions, including the assistant principal and one English teacher. When asked what support and guidance they needed from district leaders to ensure that they are prepared to offer students opportunities that will enable them to demonstrate skills that are required by the new graduation mandates, Dennis stated,

> The past ten years have been tough. We are so limited on staff… and resources… We are lucky. The administration didn’t just fire the assistant principal or English teacher; They didn’t replace them when they moved to other positions in the district. I don’t see them adding anything. We don’t have the enrollment or funding.

The new Spanish teacher, Nicole, shared during her interview that she was using twelve-year-old textbooks with CDs for audio translations of the book.

> Well, my problem with being unable to create a classroom that is responsive to the dynamic world around us is that I do not have current materials. My books are 12 years old, they are outdated, so for kids to care, it has to matter in their world, and whenever I'm teaching them with an obsolete CD player and an outdated textbook, it doesn't, they don't have CD players, they have iPods and they have their phones. They don't even know what a CD is. The vocabulary is also different now, and the way life is different now. We're taught to keep our students engaged, and it's hard to keep kids engaged with outdated materials.

The limitation of staff and materials has made it difficult for staff to provide opportunities for students to be in a setting that offers space and time to develop career readiness skills.

RCHS teachers shared elements of a rural school that stand in the way of students' procurement of career readiness skills. Factors such as geographic location and transportation barriers prevent students from having to opportunity to pursue learning experiences that correlate with the career readiness skills they are learning in the classroom. Teachers also attributed a more than a thirty-minute drive to industrial areas or places of employment as being the most significant barrier to career alignment and exploration. Furthermore, teachers expressed concern regarding the absence of multicultural education opportunities available to students in their school, especially since the world is a much smaller place in the workplace due to technology. Finally, teachers believed the lack of fiscal/physical resources contributed to the complications of providing students with opportunities that will enable them to demonstrate skills that are required by the new graduation mandates.

Deficit Thinking

Through multiple examination of data, it became apparent that teachers repeatedly made adversarial comments regarding students' family dynamics, background, and lack of motivation. According to teachers interviewed, these factors hampered the students' ability to acquire career readiness skills and achievement of academic success. The teachers' perceptions that a student's underperformances were due to family dynamics or experiences indicated a reproachful culture. The teachers, in no way, made a connection between the students' lack of skill development or academic success and their classroom practices. Weaved throughout the interviews were multiple conversations that included explanations describing causes for students lack of success in developing career readiness skills. However, none of the exchanges included teachers' reflections of their teaching practices or their unsuccessful efforts to nurture connections with struggling students.

Environmental Influences. Teachers described the number of environmental impacts or influences associated with a student's surroundings that hindered their acquisition of career readiness skills. In some instances, teachers believed that families did not see education as an essential vehicle for the advancement of life. Dorothy shared information about her students; "if mom and dad did not work and they do not have to show up somewhere every day, it's hard for the kids to understand that is what it takes to be successful." Charity shared that she struggled to get students to do homework outside the school day, which is a career readiness skill in itself. She disclosed,

"They don't work outside the school day. They don't understand the concept of homework. They don't make the connection with building career-ready skills, including perseverance, work ethic, self-confidence, and let's not get into the academic success that comes with homework."

Dennis added,

> Don't get us wrong; we have a lot of great kids and great families here. We have parents who will do anything to provide for their kids, and they are great role models for them, they work hard, they pay their bills, they show up to events, but we do have a large number of parents who do not follow through.

The teachers' expression of compassion for their students and frustration of individual situations led the researcher to believe the teachers were concerned for the long-term achievement of their students due to the regional economic problems and the circumstance that local families struggled to find ways to overcome the adversities. Teachers did not discuss nor deliberate how the school could respond to the disparities by incorporating career readiness skills into classroom practices that could be shared by students with families and community members outside the designated school day.

Economic Status of Families and Beliefs. Teachers pointed out the number of potential employment opportunities within the county has declined significantly since 2008, leaving some families in difficult financial situations or poverty. This decline has impacted the way families interact and show support for the school. Teachers viewed the change in family support as a barrier to cultivating career readiness and other skills. Matt commented, "people do not come out to support the kids anymore; our school used to be the hub of the community." In turn, all nine teachers believed these circumstances have also impacted student progress and performance at school as teachers attempt to communicate and demonstrate career readiness skills in preparation for students' post-secondary endeavors. Charity shared her concerns,

> Though this is my hometown, I feel like, in a lot of ways, many of these kids have it even worse than I did. I had what I needed growing up but, I have a lot of students now

> whose parents are not around to help them, and they don't have what they need. Some of the students do not have the clothes or food they need to get by much less the skills they need to move forward. The scary part is, teachers would never know it if they didn't live in this community themselves.

Ann shared her adverse description of the challenges of generational poverty as a barrier to implementing career readiness skills into teaching practices. She indicated,

> Some of the families are gifted in knowing what free programs are available to them and what benefits they can get. Therefore, they sometimes do not see the advantages of obtaining skills. They need to be able to work. The kids are not raised to think that being productive and employed is vital… is a good goal.

Three other teachers agreed with Ann's narrative; Dorothy added,

> Kids struggle to come to school because mom and dad do not value education or have jobs themselves. These parents do not rationalize sending their kids to school every day if they do not have to go to work.

Teachers attributed the economic status of families and elated behaviors as barriers to implementing career readiness skills into classroom practices due to the adversarial interpretations and lack of family support they would receive during the implementation process.

Motivation. Teachers described family relationships and student motivation ranging from highly motivated to extremely unmotivated, which they believe affected their ability to incorporate career readiness skills into teaching practices. Teachers shared that students made negative connotations when work-ethic topics are introduced or discussed. Dennis chuckled with his response, "We have those helicopter parents who are always wanting to make excuses

for their kid, which, in some cases, leads to very little student motivation in the classroom. Then we have other kids who work their butts off, and their parents are not involved at all. It's tough to understand. I guess they just have grit." Cathy added to the conversation, describing the motivation of one senior girl who has overcome many obstacles in her personal life, but she is proving to be successful at RCHS,

> Morgan has moved around a lot, and she is raising herself. She is graduating this year after coming here with very few credits. She is very, very smart, and works hard. I know the guidance counselor has been working with her to come up with a plan for her to get a job and go to college somewhere. She is not letting her past decide her future.

In these examples, the teachers focused on what an individual student accomplished on their own to achieve success and overcome adversities. The attention was on individual student determination and will to succeed instead of the student need for guidance or encouragement from a respected adult.

Peer relationships. The interaction among peers at school is a fundamental part of the learning process that influences the lifelong learning practices of students. At times, the demand and opinions of friends can overpower the need to be successful at home or school. Peer relationship demands are a problem at RCHS according to interviewees. Teachers described instances where peer relationships influenced students positively and negatively, causing teachers to struggle when implementing career readiness skills into their teaching. Ann explained how peer relations were a negative influence,

> Sometimes students within a class can color it for everybody because those students try to be cool, not cool in a basketball way, but in a, everybody knows they probably smoked cigarettes, and they probably drank, and they partied, and they're tough… they get

> everyone wound up, even the good kids. Even though there is a minority population, they can be a loud voice within the classroom at times, which causes me to become distracted and ineffective.

The interview conversation did not prompt teachers to converse about trepidations regarding the "colorful behaviors" that took place in the classroom. Correspondingly, Ann's comments did not generate teacher discussion or personal reflections of their instructional practices or classroom practices. They only attributed the "colorful behaviors" to students and their irresponsible actions.

In this study, the teachers' perceptions that a student's inability to acquire career readiness skills were due to family dynamics, motivation, or peer relationships indicated a was an indicator of teacher deficit thinking. Weaved throughout the interviews were teacher conversations of individual student's ability to overcome adversities along with reasons why some students were unsuccessful or could not be successful at developing career readiness skills. However, none of the teacher discussions centered around their reflection of classroom practices or unsuccessful efforts at fostering relationships with struggling students.

Professional Challenges

Participants also shared the professional challenges of rural high school teachers that caused career readiness skill implementation to be complicated. In conversations, teachers described professional challenges as the career-related aspects of teaching in a rural community that affect classroom practices. They shared their struggles with the demands placed upon them to prepare and teach content for multiple subject areas. They also indicated the challenges they have faced implementing career readiness skills in their teaching practices due to the lack of fiscal and physical resources. Finally, teachers elaborated on problems related to being the only

content area teacher in the building and having to continually add content (now career readiness skills, for example) to their course load. One of the most common challenges portrayed by all of the teachers were the difficulties they faced to collaborate with other "like-minded" professionals.

Teaching Multiple Classes. Teachers discussed the demands of planning and teaching as many as eight different classes throughout the day. All nine teachers reported having at least three courses to plan and teach. Charity, who primarily teaches English, said that her day involves "two periods of dual credit composition, one period of dual credit speech, one period of AP language, one period of career information (homeroom), and one period of theater arts." Allyson, who teaches science courses, stated that she has five courses to prepare for and teach. "I have two sections of honors biology, two sections of honors chemistry, two sections of integrated chemistry and physics, and one period of career information (homeroom)," Cathy reports that she prepares for and teaches eight different classes, two of which take place during the same period. "I teach work-based learning, business classes, government, career information (homeroom), and this year I'm teaching two periods of economics to seniors." Noticeably, teachers did not complain about the work involved in planning and teaching for the current workload and took pride in what they accomplish within a class period. During the focus group interview, Dennis stated, "that's what we do here, we give the kids what they need."

Professional Isolation. All nine teachers struggled with being the only teacher in the building for their specific subject area. When I interviewed Dennis, he recognized me from when I taught in another district. We were both parts of the Teaching American History Fellowship in 2008. He spoke about how enjoyable that professional experience was for him and how he benefitted from being able to collaborate with other history teachers. He said, "That was the best

professional development opportunity I have experienced in all of the fifteen years I have been teaching. Everyone was so into the content and shared great lessons and experiences." Kris, who has only been teaching a couple of years, describes her frustration with being the only biology teacher in the building.

> With all of these preps, I don't have time to reach out to other biology teachers. Since I grew up here and now teach here, I'm not even sure I know anyone else who teaches biology. I guess I could reach out to the teacher I worked with at Floyd Central…

Cathy supported Kris's comment by saying, "In all my years of teaching, I have never collaborated with another Economics teacher, I would have to say that might be nice."

Teachers believed professional isolation is one reason for their lack of familiarity and expertise when it came to incorporating career readiness into their classroom practices. They maintained the opportunity to collaborate with fellow content area teachers would enable them to acquire information regarding the new graduation requirements and approaches to incorporate career readiness skills.

Interview participants shared the professional challenges that caused career readiness skill implementation to be difficult in their rural high school. In conversations, teachers described professional challenges that included difficulties in identifying specific career readiness skills that correlate with each of the multiple subject area classes they are required to teach. They also identified the challenges and apprehensions affiliated with implementing career readiness skills in their teaching practices due to professional isolation. Their most significant concern regarding the isolation was their inability to collaborate with other teachers to obtain knowledge about standards and skills that must be taught so that students can graduate career-ready.

Summary

The second research question examined the challenges faced by rural high school teachers when they integrate career readiness skills into teaching practices. Three distinct themes arose from the face-to-face interviews and the focus group interview. First, *elements of rural schools,* which addressed the unique social structures and circumstances that influence a rural high school. The second, *deficit thinking*, described the teachers' beliefs that actions and activities outside the classroom, over which the teachers have no control, were the sources for the students' inability to acquire skills or achieve success. All participants used deficit thinking to rationalize students' lack of success at school but did not reflect on the possibility of the school's intervention or influence. Finally, *teacher professional challenges due to isolation* described challenges teachers faced by being isolated from other like-minded professionals. Multiple participants described the difficulties and influences the isolation had on their abilities to improve professionally, including the procurement of the proficiencies and knowledge related to incorporating career readiness skills into classroom practices.

Integrated Practices

The third research question examined integrated practices RCHS teachers believed foster high school students' acquisition of career readiness skills. A careful review of the interview data allowed for the deconstruction of teachers' perceptions of these practices as they correlated with students' acquisition of career readiness skills at River City High School. The theme that emerged from the analysis of data, including artifacts, was *integrated practices*. While looking closely at the data associated with integrated practices described by teachers, it became apparent that all methods mentioned by participants as means to incorporate career readiness skills were

whole school initiatives, systemic programming, or course offerings available to all students at RCHS.

Integrated practices included school-wide programs, both social and academic, created by the administrators, teachers, and support staff that inspire students to grow academically, develop skills, including career readiness skills, and gain competencies that are necessary to become productive citizens. The data and artifacts found in this study revealed consistent teacher perceptions of integrated practices that influence the development of career readiness skills for students at RCHS, including school-wide expectations, the career information course, and technology integration.

School-Wide Expectations

Focus group participants (Dennis, Cathy, Charity, Anne, Kris, and Nicole) discussed how school-wide expectations at RCHS were developed to create a respectful and inviting culture. In this study, school-wide expectations were defined by the PBIS Matrix, a visual that clearly communicates school-wide expectations, and the RCHS Student Handbook. In a letter to the RCHS community, school-wide expectations were described as meant to "encourage students to show pride in their school and themselves, take ownership of the choices they make, and respect others in the school and the community," (Marilyn, personal communication, March 2019). During the focus group interview, Charity mentioned their school expectations were first established in the Student Handbook and were carried out utilizing a Positive Based Intervention Support model[1]. RCHS has used this model for the past three years, which includes a Power

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Matrix framework (Charity, personal communication, March 2019). The Power Matrix framework outlined the positive behavior expectancies the students ought to exhibit (Appendix J). The teachers continued to discuss the utilization of the PBIS program to make wise choices, be responsible, and show respect and pride in themselves, school, and community (Charity personal communication, March 2019). Together as a group, the teachers determined the PBIS Matrix included, "pride, ownership, wise choices, excellence, and respect." The teachers continued with a discussion about the lessons that accompanied the PBIS program. When I asked if they taught these lessons regularly, Dennis responded, "Not as much now because we lost Lynn, our assistant principal who was in charge of it. The first year we did better, and the kids learned the skills, but when we lost Lynn, we went downhill." Charity continued, "It's a little willy-nilly now, the lessons used to be every week, but we have gone downhill because there is no one technically overseeing it." Cathy added, "Amanda H. is now in charge of it, but she has too much on her plate. However, we do have a calendar of scheduled PBIS events that we follow every month" (Appendix K).

In a separate interview, Charity shared the relationship between the PBIS model used and the Indiana Employability Skills Framework, which lists the skills Indiana employers feel are necessary for success in the workplace. She stated, "The items on this list, referring to the handout, follow our PBIS Power Matrix. We teach some of these skills like technology and

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Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support can be defined as a multi-tiered gamut that supports the social, emotional, academic and behavioral competencies of all students. School staff members utilize modeling, practicing, and encouragement of positive expectations across the school setting and through students in order to develop a positive school climate and learning environment (PBIS.org, June 2018).

teamwork plus we hold students accountable for developing most of the other things on here in our classrooms." Here again, she referred to the Employability Skills Framework handout. She pointed out that student acquisition of time management, written communication, and teamwork was most important in her classroom.

Aileen and Anne also brought up the student handbook, precisely the attendance policy as a way to maintain school-wide expectations. Aileen explained, "We have to teach students that attendance is important. Some teachers at RCHS follow the school-wide policy, and some do not." Ann added, "We each have our own classroom expectations when it comes to attendance, but the handbook policy trumps ours if there are issues." Anne agreed, saying that "attendance is one of those areas our students struggle to maintain, and it shows in the workforce. She continued,

> My son graduated from this high school, and when he went into the workforce, he didn't believe his boss when he told him he would be fired if he missed more than three days. What happened when my son missed the fourth day? He was fired. That is why I try to do everything I can to ensure that students acquire that skill of showing up. I hold them accountable, I bribe them, and I share my son's story with them.

As noted above, one way the teachers fostered the acquisition of career readiness skills in the classrooms was by utilizing school-wide expectations including the PBIS framework and the RCHS student handbook. By observing the artifacts, including the PBIS Target Behavior and Awards Calendar, it was noticed that each month the school celebrated each of the items listed in the Power Matrix, including attendance, which is considered a wise choice on the Matrix. The teachers did not go into great detail as to how students qualified for the awards program, only that they really enjoyed the opportunity to get out of class.

According to the teachers who participated in the focus group interview, the student handbook was used to plan and develop the school-wide expectations at RCHS. Next, the student handbook was used to establish a PBIS Framework and Power Matrix specifically for the students at RCHS. This program was used by administrators and staff to outline the positive behavior expectancies the students ought to exhibit. All teachers interviewed believed this integrated practice was effective in students' development of career readiness skills, particularly noted by teachers as skills initiated by the PBIS program that directly relate to the workforce were time management, written communication, and teamwork.

Career Information Course

Focus group participants (Dennis, Cathy, Charity, Anne, Kris, and Nicole) discussed how the career information course at RCHS helped students acquire career readiness skills. The career information course is a 27-minute daily class period in the middle of the day designed to address future graduation requirements, according to Allyson.

> For the tenth graders, we call the class community service because, with the state changes to graduation, they are requiring all graduates to have community service. I could be wrong here, but depending on which pathway they take, community service may be required, so, starting this year, we require all of our tenth-grade students to have one year of community service.

When asked the teachers if every grade level offered the same community service element, their responses varied and revealed some confusion. Cathy replied,

> Only sophomores are doing community service unless a junior or senior has not passed ISTEP. Other grade levels are doing different things. I think freshmen are doing

> something called Gear Up and juniors and seniors are working on resumes and scholarship applications.

Kris added, “In that class, I have one group of students over here that is working on college scholarship applications and another group over here that is not planning to go to college, so I’m not sure what to set them up with?” Allyson shared the experience she had with her career information class,

> My sophomore community service class paired up with our fifth-grade students at South River Elementary as pen pals. The kids wrote letters back and forth every week, and ironically today was the day that we got to take a half a day field trip and go to their school and meet them face-to-face for the first time. My girls planned crafts and had all kinds of glitter, glue, and beads, and the boys planned basketball and dodge ball. It was so fun! I saw a whole lot of mentoring going on, and I don't even know if my students realized it, but it was. It was just a fantastic experience to see the sophomores mentoring fifth graders. They were developing so many career readiness skills during that class, including teamwork, adaptability, and communication skills they will use as adults, and they don’t even know it.

In Ann’s career information class of sophomores, she shared that she does a variety of activities with students to develop self-confidence, independence, and a sense of self-purpose, which are all career readiness skills. They participated in activities from producing a clothes closet for the whole community to playing with tinker toys. She stated,

> In my class, we are in charge of a yearlong clothes closet, and we work hard. The students launder the clothes, they mend and sew on buttons, they organize, repurpose and recycle those items to the school at large. Any student can use their Powerbucks, PBIS

> reward cash, to purchase the items from the clothes closet regularly. When we have downtime, I also try to bring in other things for the kids to do that may or may not be career readiness activities. A couple of years ago I discovered that my students, even though they are in high school, had never played with Playdough, pixie sticks, Lincoln Logs or other tinker toys so we talk about the complexities of these simple toys and enjoy a little fun time with them while, at the same time, they learned collaboration skills, problem-solving, and teamwork. A pretty sneaky way of teaching those skills, they are learning and don't even know it.

Each of the grade levels throughout the building offered some type of service-learning opportunity for students. Teachers worked collaboratively to provide something that appealed to students and enabled them to give back to the community in some way. Teachers believed the career readiness skills they utilized during these 27-minutes of the day were instrumental to students as they move through high school and into post-secondary education or the workforce.

Technology Integration

Focus group participants (Dennis, Cathy, Charity, Anne, Kris, and Nicole) discussed how technology integration at RCHS was implemented to provide students with career readiness skills, including collaboration and communication. Technology integration, including a one-to-one laptop device student initiative, has been in place for three years. This integrated practice empowers every high school student to be "connected" using a laptop device that enables them to have access to online textbooks and software they will need to complete daily classroom assignments or projects. According to the participants, employers look for potential employees to have skills associated with technology. They described technology integration as having the capability to use a computer for communication, word processing, social media interactions, and

possibly the development of hardware skills specific for a particular job. Teachers at RCHS talked about not only how students utilize the one-to-one devices to enhance career readiness skills but also described challenges they had with the technology as an integrated practice. Three teachers considered their technology skills to be deficient, and they admitted to being overwhelmed by the implementation of technology into their classroom practices. Cathy shared how tech-savvy her students were,

> Kids use their phones and Chromebooks for everything these days. Students text and email; they create videos; they upload to Instagram, Facebook, etc. Don't get me wrong; they need to learn to use these to be productive and such, but sometimes I feel like these items are more of a distraction than a tool.

Kris shared that she encourages the students to use their phones in class,

> By the time they are juniors and seniors, they are going to have to learn to use them industriously. We need them for calculations, timing, etc. so I expect them to use them responsibly. If they do not, we have a private conversation. These issues we have with devices are similar to what happens in the workforce, and we talk about that.

One noteworthy response about using technology to foster the acquisition of career readiness skills came from Ann.

> I believe that people who retain the soft skills without technology, I think, will rise to the top because when everybody can text and talk through text, then the guy who's going to be in charge of everybody is the person is not text-dependent.

The teachers in the focus group received this comment as an "Aha moment," meaning, they were fascinated by this conclusion, then agreed with Ann.

Six teachers provided evidence to support the benefits of incorporating technology and one-to-one devices into their classroom practices. Teachers contend the devices and technology usage was beneficial to students on multiple levels as they developed skills they would need for the future workforce. The teachers believed student utilization of tools such as the Google platform in the classroom offered them the opportunity to create documents and presentations, as well as collaborate on assignments with other students. Conversely, three teachers believed the utilization of this technology was too much of a distraction for many students and chose to use it minimally in the classroom.

Summary

The third research question examined integrated practices RCHS teachers believed foster high school students' acquisition of career readiness skills. A careful review of the interview data allowed for the deconstruction of teachers' perceptions of these approaches as they correlated with students' acquisition of career readiness skills at River City High School. One theme, integrated practices emerged from the analysis of data, including an artifact review. While looking closer at the data associated with integrated practices described by teachers, it became apparent the all practices mentioned by participants as approaches to incorporating career readiness skills were integrated practices specific to RCHS including school-wide expectations, a career information course offered to all students, and technology integration.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed explanation of the themes and subthemes relevant to each of the three research questions. Participants reflected their perceptions of the incorporation of career readiness skills into classroom practices. The teachers all reported there was value in students obtaining career readiness skills in high school. Since RCHS is in a rural community,

teachers believe it is their responsibility to prepare students for post-secondary options and life after high school. The teachers were aware that teaching students career readiness skills and fostering their acquisition would inspire most students to explore career opportunities, both local and national, which would be an advantage to every student. The teachers expressed that the principal offered them the flexibility to utilize teaching practices that will meet the needs of the students as long as they follow the standards. Therefore, all teachers believe incorporating the skills into teaching practices must be intentional.

This study revealed that participants perceived changes to the graduation process would create more need for student development of career readiness skills. Additionally, it was detected that participants needed more support in the cultivation of teaching strategies to embed career readiness skills into classroom practices, specifically those in rural school districts. Chapter 5 will provide a summary and interpretation of the findings, recommend specific actions, then discuss topics for further studies. Chapter 5 will end with a reflection of my experience in conducting this study of a rural high school.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This qualitative case study explored high school teachers' experiences and perceptions as they implement career readiness skills into their classroom practices. As noted in the literature review, a one-size-fits-all approach to preparing students for our knowledge economy is not working (Baker, 2013). Many initiatives and programs throughout the United States have embraced the idea of career readiness skill development in high school students, which demonstrates the significance of this subject (Casner-Lotto, 2006). The review of the current literature revealed that studies had taken place within inner-city or suburban high schools regarding the implementation of career readiness skills, but research exposed only a few studies about rural contexts and career readiness development.

The overall goals of this study were to answer the research questions, share notable successes related to the incorporation of career readiness skills in one rural high school, and make suggestions regarding the removal of barriers for future implementation in rural communities. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore high school teachers' experiences and perceptions as they implemented career readiness skills into their classroom practices. Based on the literature review and the case study research, integrating career readiness skills into classroom practices is a viable method for students to develop an understanding of how important it is for them to develop career readiness skills and graduate from high school prepared for the workforce. Employer surveys have shown over and over again that business leaders and human resource professionals are concerned that the younger U.S. workforce is not nearly as well educated and prepared as their peers in competing nations (Pawlowski & Katz, 2014).

Summary of Research

According to Yin (2014), a case study is an in-depth study of a topic which "investigates a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context" (p.4). Using a descriptive case study allowed for insight into individual high school teachers' perception of incorporating career readiness skills into their classroom practices, the challenges they faced when integrating the career readiness skills, and integrated practices believed to foster high school students' acquisition of career readiness skills. A case study is appropriate for this study because it allowed the researcher to focus on one high schools' circumstance to retain a holistic and real-world perspective (Yin, 2014, p. 4). The following section includes a discussion of how perceptions and insights of participants impacted the implementation of career readiness skills and related to the previously identified interpretations in literature. The discussion and analysis of this study's findings have been organized by research question.

The findings and interpretations that emerged from the study are based on the perceptions and actions of nine rural high school teachers who agreed to participate. Nine semi-structured interviews and one focus group interview were the primary data collection methods for this case study, along with observations, field notes, and review of artifacts. First, nine individual semi-structured interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed, with the researcher adding documentation of non-verbal cues and reactions of participants to enhance the meaning-making process. Next, the process included one focus group interview comprised of six teachers who also participated in the individual, semi-structured interviews to add clarity, understanding, and validation to the study. Finally, the researcher gathered documents that supported the integration of career readiness skills in the classroom as well as documents related to district career readiness skills initiatives and professional development opportunities for teachers.

Documentation from the document review and transcriptions from both the face-to-face and focus group interviews were then analyzed and coded

Summary of Findings

Through the research and data analysis of this study, the researcher sought to understand the participants' perceptions of their journey through the lens of their experiences of utilizing classroom practice to integrate career readiness skills. The researcher's arbitrary stances were used to gather, interpret, and categorize data into themes. Three main themes emerged from the data analysis of relevant artifacts and transcriptions from nine individual and one focus group semi-structured interviews. The themes include (1) Incorporating Career Readiness Skills, (2) Obstacles to Integrating Career Readiness Skills into Classroom Practices, and (3) Integrated Practices.

Results from the research findings were analyzed and positioned within the relevant literature. The study's results indicated participants believed it was important for students in rural areas to obtain career readiness in high school. The teacher participants also believed it was their responsibility to ensure students' acquisition of these skills was accomplished. Teacher participants felt that changes to the graduation process in Indiana would result in more pressure from the Indiana Department of Education to ensure students developed career readiness skills. Finally, it was detected from the analysis of data that teacher participants believed they needed more support in the development and cultivation of effective teaching strategies to embed career readiness skills into classroom practices, specially designed for teachers in rural school districts.

Incorporating Career Readiness Skills

The first research question examined how rural high school teachers incorporated career readiness skills into their classroom practices. Each of the three themes uncovered from this question helped to develop a picture of teachers' experiences and perceptions as they implemented career readiness skills into their classroom practices. Looking at the evidence as a whole, one can see that all teachers involved in the study believed they implemented career readiness skills into their classroom practices on some level. However, differences in classroom practices emerged and were framed as two separate approaches: a constructivist student-centered approach to implementing the skills and a teacher-centered approach to implementing the skills. Another theme was the significance of relational practices as teachers work to implement career readiness skills. All three of these themes will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

A total of six teachers (Allyson, Kris, Nicole, and Cathy along with portions of Charity and Dorothy's explanations) believed a student-centered approach was an effective way to incorporate career readiness skills into classroom practices. They also believed aligning student-centered strategies, with the building of teacher-student interpersonal relationships, encouraged students to have the confidence they needed to actively seek new information and work collaboratively with the teacher and classmates to communicate knowledge, and address problems in real-life contexts. Later in the section, relational practices will be discussed in greater detail.

The second theme that emerged from the data regarding incorporating career readiness skills included a teacher-centered approach to incorporating career readiness skills. A total of five of the teachers interviewed (Dennis, Aileen, and Anne along with portions of Charity and Dorothy's explanations) fell at least partially into this group who believed implementing and

carrying out teacher-developed policies and procedures while providing lecture-type instruction and independent assignments, in the classroom was the best way to incorporate career readiness skills into classroom practices.

The final theme to emerge from the first research question regarding incorporating career readiness skills was relational practices. All teachers interviewed, both those who adopted a student-centered approach and those who embraced a teacher-centered approach, believed it was essential to foster relationships with students and families in the River City community before students would buy into their classroom practices. Teachers believed those relationships afforded them the opportunity to engage students in the development of career readiness while also affording them the opportunity to have difficult conversations with students regarding future workforce opportunities and challenges.

Obstacles to Integrating Career Readiness Skills into Classroom Practices

The second research question examined the obstacles faced by rural high school teachers as they incorporated career readiness skills into classroom practices. The data revealed a few thought-provoking pieces of evidence regarding the themes that encompassed elements of rural schools, deficit thinking, and teacher professional challenges faced by rural high school teachers when incorporating career readiness skills.

The first theme, elements of rural schools, reinforced much of what we know about rural schools. Since the location of the school community is so far from a metropolitan area, teachers described difficulties students experienced as they tried to explore career-related opportunities or observe work skills in action. During the focus group interview, teachers (Dennis, Cathy, Charity, Anne, Kris, and Nicole) spoke passionately about the dilemmas and roadblocks surrounding transportation and student's acquisition of a driver's license. Teachers discussed

multiple student situations that involved overall student disengagement, both inside and outside the classroom. The teachers portentously came back around to blame students or their personal situations for this disengagement, which leads to the second theme to emerge, deficit thinking.

Early in the research process it was difficult for me, as an educational researcher to identify teacher deficit thinking as an obstacle for these high school teachers as they incorporated career readiness skills into classroom practices. Instead, the first couple of analyses of data led the researcher to believe that lack of motivation and lack of outside resources on behalf of the students and community were the culprits of student's inability to acquire career readiness skills. After reading new literature and revisiting the data on multiple occasions, it became apparent the majority of teacher interview responses were presented in a manner that resonated with deficit thinking. During the interview process, the teachers made no correlation between the students' absence of skill development or lack of academic success and their classroom practices. Only one teacher connected her teaching methods to students' deficiency in their procurement of career readiness skills. This teacher disclosed some level of critical reflection of her classroom practices in this singular case. Since the majority of the teachers experience deficit thinking, RCHS may benefit from an intervention plan produced by district leaders to provide support for teachers as they work together to deconstruct deficit thinking.

The final theme to emerge from this study's data was teacher professional challenges. Rural schools face the same requirements to respond to new educational reforms and organizational responsibilities as urban schools, but they do so with minimal staff. All teachers interviewed articulated concerns with the professional demands and preparation that come with teaching in a rural school and the requirement to facilitate multiple content area courses. Six of the teachers interviewed shared that they teach as many as eight different classes throughout the

day. Though they did not complain about the workload, teachers did express concerns and questioned how they would acquire information about and guide students to meet the new state graduation requirements with such a small staff. On another note, teachers described the distress they experienced related to the isolation from other professionals of similar content. They would appreciate the opportunity to discuss changes in education, including teaching approaches being used to embed career readiness skills into their classroom practice.

Integrated Practices

The third research question examined integrated practices River City High School teachers believed foster high school students' acquisition of career readiness skills. A careful review of the data allowed for a deconstruction of teachers' perceptions of those school-wide programs that contribute to students' acquisition of career readiness skills at River City High School. The theme that emerged from the analysis of data was integrated practices comprised of school-wide programs, both social and academic, created by RCHS administrators, teachers, and support staff that inspired students to grow academically, develop skills, including career readiness skills, and gain competencies that are necessary to become productive citizens. The data and artifacts revealed all teachers perceived that school-wide expectations, the career information course, and a one-to-one technology initiative all fostered students' acquisition of career readiness skills.

All teachers perceived the implementation of a Positive Based Intervention Support (PBIS) model, and enforcement of the student handbook fostered school-wide expectations that encouraged students to show pride in their school and themselves, take ownership of the choices they made, and respect others in the school and the community. After completing a thorough look at the interview data and artifacts, it was determined that the RCHS version of PBIS was

modified to accommodate the school community. For example, the Power Matrix framework that outlined the positive behavior expectations was created by staff members based on the dynamics and make up of RCHS. The matrix included a calendar of monthly targeted behaviors and rewards. In the interviews, multiple teachers commented on the "Wise Choices" within the Power Matrix and the lessons that accompanied it that influenced career readiness skills, including punctuality and attendance.

Teachers also perceived the career information course that was held in the middle of the day brought great value and benefit to the students as they worked to develop their service-learning projects and explore career pathways. Each grade level nine through twelve were required to complete some service-learning project. At RCHS, those projects ranged from sophomores developing and running a clothes closet to participating in a pen pal project with a neighboring elementary class of fifth graders. Teachers reflected that all students were engaged in the process and enjoyed the real-life scenarios that promoted career readiness skills, including teamwork, adaptability, and communication skills they would use in the workplace.

Technology integration, including a one-to-one initiative, has been in full swing at RCHS for four years. This integrated practice empowers every high school student to be "connected" using a laptop device that enables them to access textbooks, online software, and other resources they may need to complete projects and assignments for school. As noted throughout this study, employers are looking for personnel that can use technology for communication, social interaction, word processing, or possibly even a specific job-related skill. Multiple teachers described specific incidences where students used various platforms, including Google and Microsoft Office, to create documents and presentations that could be shared with students or teachers. The most thought-provoking conversations related to technology came from three

veteran teachers who believed that technology and Chromebook devices were more of a distraction for students and should not be used freely in the classroom. Ann shared her concern that students have an addiction to technology, and the addiction was hindering students' ability to interact or collaborate with others. She expressed a need for a balance between social interaction and technology instead of all one way or the other. Proficiencies in technology are essential career readiness skills students must have before they leave high school. They must be able to use technologies to create and share information, calculate data, troubleshoot, and solve problems. At RCHS, teachers would benefit from additional professional development in this area as technology integration techniques change rapidly, and teachers need to be able to integrate those readiness skills into daily classroom practices.

Discussion of Findings

The case study presented in this paper provides evidence that advancements can be made in rural high school classroom implementation of career readiness skills. This study and other current research supports the findings that a student-centered classroom promotes the development of career readiness skills. According to a 2015 study done by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and UMass Donahue Institute, teachers endorsed student-centered learning because it promoted higher student engagement and facilitated learning that was more applicable to students' future in a global workforce (Kaput, 2018). The six teachers interviewed at RCHS who employed a constructivist student-centered approach are aligned with best practices as described by Outukile-Mongwaketse (2016) and the U.S. Department of Education (2019) which identified three practices that moved students along the continuum of career readiness including, career exposure within the curriculum, connect classroom content with career pathways by linking each unit of study to a specific job or career field, and helping

students develop self-awareness through modeling and asking students to reflect on activities or projects (Defined Stem, 2019). Other research also supports the student-centered approach at RCHS because those teachers utilizing those classroom practices are preparing their students to be career-ready. According to Yoder (2014), student-centered teachers do more than promote academic learning, they teach the whole child. Student-centered teachers help strengthen the skills needed to be career-ready, such as collaborating with others, monitoring their behavior, and making responsible decisions. It will be necessary for student-centered teachers to remain well-informed of methods and approaches that enable their students to grow as learners, specifically deeper learning approaches and opportunities that can be applied to career readiness.

The outcomes of this study parallel results from other research that discovered teacher-centered classrooms do not provide students with the opportunity to outgrow their dependency on the teacher, therefore making it difficult for the student to develop a sense of self-directed learning which, also noted in the research, was one of the key competencies to being successful in a global workforce (Komp, 2012). The second area of concern pointed out by current research, including the present study, regarding career readiness skills and a teacher-centered classroom was the lack of opportunities for students to communicate cross-culturally, problem solve, and collaborate with others (Farrell & Fenwick, 2007). Finally, both the current study and additional research explained teacher centered classrooms usually focused on classroom management and transmission of knowledge rather than teacher integration of high-quality academic instruction and student engagement (Garrett, 2008). Teachers who used a teacher-centered approach at RCHS were most likely doing their students a disservice; according to Komp (2012); Farrell & Fennwick (2007) and Blymefeld, Krajcik, Marx, and Soloway (1994), who provided evidence that teacher-directed instruction was problematic. Therefore, teachers at RCHS should be

provided professional development opportunities regarding successful classroom application of deeper learning activities so that a more student-centered approach could be taken.

A significant amount of research supports the findings of this study (i.e., Rimm-Kaufaman, Sandilos, 2011; Decker, Dona, & Christenson, 2007; Charney, 2002; Donahue, Perry & Weinstein, 2003; Wentzel, 2010 and Allenworth & Easton, 2007). With a good number of RCHS teachers still using a teacher-centered approach and related methods, school leaders should be concerned about their students' acquisition of career readiness skills. It will be necessary for school and district leaders to provide appropriate professional development on more applicable student-centered, constructive approaches in the future.

Whether they realize it or not, the perception of teachers affects their students. When teachers discount their students' ability to develop skills and be successful based on family dynamics or experiences indicates a culture of deficit thinking. Teachers at RCHS frequently gave explanations or reasons students were not successful or could not be successful at developing career readiness skills due to environmental influences, economic status of family, lack of motivation, and/or peer relationships. During the interview process, none of the teacher discussions centered around their reflection of classroom practices or unsuccessful efforts at fostering relationships with struggling students. Further conversations with the teachers may lead to circumstances that enable them to discover the tenacity of their perceptions resulting in the development of a stance that promotes positive and engaging teaching practices that inspire students to secure the career readiness skills they need.

Research supports the use of teacher growth to explore the issues of deficit thinking and work to address the problems of changing the culture (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Dweck (2016) described how a person's ability to acquire a growth mindset could foster outstanding

individual accomplishments and motivate others. School districts across the country are embracing these ideas and creating professional development plans for teachers to discover the value of teaching mindset and convictions. Current research revealed district leaders around the nation are working to transcend teachers from deficit thinking to an academic growth mindset as well as working to cultivate growth mindset teaching practice within their classrooms (Sun, 2015). RCHS teachers would greatly benefit from a similar professional development program, primarily as they work to incorporate career readiness skills into classroom practices.

Regardless of location, economic divides, or geographic isolation, current research from Redding & Walberg (2012) maintains teachers and school leaders in rural high schools must give all students every advantage possible. Educators from rural schools must become vocal about the challenges faced by students and teachers by talking with lawmakers. Conversations with these individuals will make them aware of the essential needs and shortfalls of small schools, including transportation barriers, teachers burdened with teaching multiple subjects and taking on various programs or endeavors to support students. District leaders must engage community organizations, businesses, and area post-secondary facilities to support district initiatives, particularly the preparation of students for a global workforce. Just as important, local government agencies and school leaders must work together to pursue grants and other sustainable alternative funding sources to maintain facilities and offer teachers professional development courses around the development of career readiness skills in every classroom.

As RCHS continues to cultivate integrated practices for the whole school, they must remember, there is a significant number of resources and opportunities out there that would benefit their efforts. There is a considerable amount of research related to Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) that relates to the findings of this study at RCHS. The

delivery of a PBIS program in the "real world" often looks significantly different from what was initially intended by the program designers (Molloy, Moore, Trail, VanEpps, and Hopfer, 2014). The most distressing comments made by teachers at RCHS regarding the integrated practice of PBIS were associated with the teachers' trepidations that no one was currently in charge of the program due to administrative changes; they were fearful the program would lose its value and fold. It is my discernment that communication and support for the PBIS program from school and district administrators would alleviate teacher unrest and provide guidance for everyone.

One concerning finding from this study is the possibility of the teacher-centered methodologies regaining strength throughout the building because teachers are looking for direction with the loss of the PBIS leaders. As noted in Chapter 4, the teacher-centered approach emphasizes a student's ability to follow policies and procedures; three teachers talked about how this was similar to what a boss would require of an employee. This teacher-centered method does not align with the PBIS model (Martin, 2013) but could become the new norm. Without administrative support of the PBIS program, the methods employed by teacher-centered teachers may regain prevalence, which, as research noted, is not aligned with best practices in achieving career readiness skills.

Lastly, it must be pointed out that technology skills and competence are imperative for anyone planning to enter the workforce now or in the foreseeable future. High school students need technology-based instruction to succeed in the 21st-century workforce. Most teachers at RCHS understood the value of this instruction; however, only a few teachers assumed responsibility for providing students with the opportunities to obtain these valuable career readiness skills. Conversely, through insightful analysis of current research, it was revealed that the attitudes and beliefs of individual teachers to technology integration have an impact of

whether the students are successfully utilizing the device in the classroom to build career readiness skills, specifically digital literacy skills (Piliouras, Yu, Villaneva, Chen, Robillard, and Berson, 2014). Therefore, teachers at RCHS who are hesitant to use technology in the classroom are not providing students with the necessary skills they need to be successful in obtaining future employment. Administrators should ensure all students have equitable access to appropriate technology instruction and usage, regardless teacher assignment.

Reflection on Conceptual Framework

In this study, the research questions were fundamental in the development of the emerging interpretations of the information based on the perceptions of the teachers and their experiences in the classroom. The conceptual framework surrounding this study related to integrating career readiness skills into classroom practices included the theory of constructivism and deeper learning. The two concepts came together to embrace the development and transference of individual knowledge; both constructivism and deeper learning encourage teachers to cultivate their knowledge and understanding of a thought, idea, or notion which will, in turn, lead to classroom discussions and activities enabling students to be deliberate and create varying interpretations of the same concept (Hutchinson, 2013). Most importantly, both the theory of constructivism and deeper learning are centered around a real-world learning process with teacher-coordinated lessons being taught in a manner that offers students multiple opportunities to engage in career readiness skills. Methods which fit into a real-world learning process include active problem solving, meaningful inquiry, and personal reflection.

Throughout the study, the researcher assumed that constructivism would prove to be the underlying foundation as teachers drew conclusions and shared their perspectives related to the incorporation of career readiness skills into classroom practices and that the constructivist

approach would be complemented by building capacities for deeper learning. Throughout the research interview process, RCHS teachers reflected on how their teaching goals, classroom organization, and the pedagogical strategies fundamentally encompassed career readiness skills, especially those teachers who applied the constructivist student-centered approaches. However, findings showed a minimal association between the learning opportunities offered by classroom teachers and the concept of deeper learning. For example, due to the number of responsibilities and number of courses teachers taught in this rural high school, teachers admitted they struggled to offer students deeper learning opportunities that allowed them to engage in challenges where they had to research and explore conflicts and then develop steps to formulate solutions for those challenges. Teachers also shared that time constraints made it difficult to create and promote new initiatives within the school or initiate learning opportunities that encourage students to develop the fortitude they needed to persevere through difficult situations. Instead, RCHS teachers shared they were focused on fundamental skill instruction and coverage of content that met the requirements of the Indiana State Standards. For this reason, the theoretical implications (that constructivism would lead to deeper learning) did not completely align with the conceptual framework of the study. Again, this was because teachers were struggling to maintain instruction on academic standards, preserve classroom structure, and to provide students with personal support to meet their daily needs.

Implications and Recommendations

The changing dynamics of high school graduation requirements in the state of Indiana and the research related to the vast number of baby boomers retiring and leaving a depleted workforce has brought about great controversy in high schools across the country. Many believe

students are not graduating from high school prepared for the workforce or post-secondary education (Goodwin & Hein, 2016).

Change is difficult for rural communities, but as the workforce becomes more global, it is becoming imperative for school communities to recognize and embrace change no matter the size or makeup. The findings in this study suggest that there are essential practices needed in rural schools to succeed in the implementation of career readiness skills into classroom practices. The three critical ingredients determined by this current study as a need for rural high schools as they implement career readiness skills into classroom practices are (a) teacher development (b) working collaboratively, and (c) awareness. Research pinpoints school administrators as being ultimately responsible for directing the identification and implementation of strategic methods. This study's findings, aligned with current research, and highlighted the following practices as essential to implementing career readiness skills.

Teacher Development

Resources and tools related to career readiness must be made readily available for teachers as they work to embed these skills into classroom practices. School administrators must provide learning opportunities for teachers regularly, not only in the area of career readiness but also in constructivist student-centered teaching approaches. The Indiana Department of Education offers direction and online support for teachers as the new graduation requirements, including career readiness skills, are implemented this year. Professional development will continue to be necessary for teachers to understand and apply the fundamental components of the Indiana Employability Skills Framework as it relates to deeper learning. The school corporation's Education Service Center is an invaluable resource that provides professional development opportunities at a reasonable cost for school corporations within its boundaries.

Also employing assistance from the districts' master teachers can be a valuable resource to use when describing deeper learning strategies as they relate to classroom practices. Utilizing teacher leaders will improve building leadership and strengthen trust among the district educators.

Working Collaboratively

Administrators, teachers, and the school community should work collaboratively to overcome the challenging elements of a rural school that hamper high school students' career readiness. The River City community is faced with the same lack of educational resources that other rural areas throughout the country. One way to combat this issue is creating collaborative learning opportunities with local business entities such as the region's energy, healthcare, and manufacturing industries who are seeking highly skilled workers (Bohanon, 2017). The RCHS community is working to develop this type of program but could benefit from more local participants. There is one local manufacturing company within the school boundaries of River City County, as well as several small business entities that may be willing to develop a collaborative program with the high school. Another collaborative effort to ensure an improvement in educational outcomes, while also meeting industry workforce demands, would be to collaborate with other local school districts to develop a career readiness program. A partnership of this nature could attract grant opportunities and financial support for all districts involved, as well as open possibilities for collaboration efforts on behalf of both students and teachers.

Awareness

Teachers with a deficit thinking lower the quality of education and offer less instruction to students (Bomer, 2009). For students living in rural areas, good teachers and powerful teaching are crucial to student success. Therefore, school leaders need to remain aware of the

day-to-day proceedings and mindsets that materialize throughout the building. School leaders have tremendous influence over the teachers; consequently, they must remain attentive to the climate and culture of the building to ward off deficit thinking before it progresses to an unhealthy level (Wallace Foundation, 2004). The administrators must also be cautious about deconstructing the components of deficit thinking without positioning the teachers as the center of the problem because, in reality, the issue could involve a more extensive community concern (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). A straightforward solution for administrators as they attempt to free the building of deficit thinking is to provide full staff training related to the diversity of all forms (Parker, 2015). The goal of this training should be to foster teachers' and other staff members' abilities to think in terms of developing a positive classroom culture for all students, no matter the students' background or ethnic origin (Parker, 2015). It will be necessary for professional development instructors to point out that there are times when individuals, no matter their role, take on personalities that may favor some groups within the classroom more than others. Bringing attention and awareness to this, along with refining staff awareness of the diversity of students within the school, can transform the teachers' attitudes and teaching practices because they view themselves as caring, unbiased educators of all students.

This study has yielded three sets of implications and recommendations as rural high schools implement career readiness skills into classroom practices. First, teachers must become knowledgeable of the new graduation mandates and understand the repercussions these requirements have on their classroom practices. It will be vital for the teachers to take advantage of online or in-person professional development opportunities offered by the regional educational services organization or the Indiana Department of Education to expand their instructional effectiveness and ability to use research-based approaches. Secondly,

administrators, teachers, and the school community must work collaboratively to overcome the problematic elements of a rural school. River City High School may wish to develop collaborative efforts with local and regional business entities to explore partnership opportunities and alternatives for students outside the classroom that encourage the alignment of educational outcomes and career readiness skills. Finally, administrators and teachers must remain focused on creating a positive learning environment for students, one that encourages all students to obtain the skills they need to be successful. All of these efforts will assist rural high school teachers in cultivating classroom practices that embed career readiness skills and produce high school graduates who are ready for the global workforce.

Future Research

As noted, the study was limited to data acquired from one high school in rural Indiana. A review of the literature indicates career opportunities are limited in rural areas. Additional research should be considered to evaluate the role that high school curriculum plays in the economic development of small communities across the country. Specifically, what schools are doing to produce competent employees for local business entities, and how are these individuals contributing to the local economy?

Concerning this study, it would be beneficial to follow the study participants over the next few years as the new graduation requirements become part of school-wide initiatives. Likewise, extending the study to include new groups of teachers from rural high schools of similar size would provide comparable data that could further validate, expand, or contradict the conclusions of the current study. Establishing procedures for implementation of career readiness skills into classroom practices is a best practice that should be adopted by all high schools seeking to improve students' ability to enter the global workforce after high school.

It would also be worthwhile to conduct a study of teachers' implementation of career readiness skills into Career Technical Education courses across the state as these courses are becoming more popular due to the new graduation requirements that include career pathway decisions and training. Interesting research could be conducted to measure both the teachers' and students' perceptions of the experiences and acquisition of career readiness skills.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore high school teachers' experiences and perceptions as they implemented career readiness skills into their classroom practices. The overall goals of this study were to answer the research questions, share notable successes related to the incorporation of career readiness skills, and suggest how to remove barriers for future implementation. This study focused on rural high school teachers because of the lack of relevant literature pertaining to career readiness in rural schools.

Completion of this study has increased the body of literature on the topic of implementation of career readiness skills into classroom teaching practices in rural high schools. This study's findings may assist rural school districts and teacher preparation programs in increasing the knowledge base for high school teachers who teach or plan to teach in rural communities. Additionally, these findings may aid state and local policymakers, as well as instructional leaders in the school districts, in creating relevant professional development plans to ensure teachers are embedding career readiness skills into classroom practices. Finally, this study has allowed teachers a chance to reflect on their experiences and practices as they continue to gain knowledge and understanding of the new Indiana graduation requirements.

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Appendix A:

Introductory E-mail for One-To-One Interviews

Greetings Study Cite Educator,

I hope this message finds you well. My name is Regina Sue Lanham. I am an administrator in this district at an elementary school campus. I am currently writing a dissertation as a requirement to earn a Doctorate in Educational Leadership at Indiana University Bloomington.

The purpose of this message is to invite you to participate in the research study. This study seeks to explore high school teacher' understanding of the new graduation mandates and how they will incorporate career readiness skills into their classroom practices as well as describe the challenges faced when integrating these career readiness skills.

If you choose to participate, you will take part in a confidential one-to-one 60-minute interview at your preferred time and location. The semi-structured interview seeks to explore your experiences relative to career readiness, the new graduation mandates and classroom practices. While there is a common set of questions that will be asked to all participants, participants may be asked to add specific details in order to expand the understanding of answers they have given. I will provide each participant with a copy of the transcription of the interviews to ensure that I've precisely captured the evidence communicated during the conversation.

With your permission, the one-to-one interview will be audio-taped and I will take notes of the conversation. The audio file will be transcribed verbatim to ensure accurate records of the conversation have been taken. While your responses will inform the findings and conclusions of

the study, your identity will be kept confidential. On transcripts, you will be recognized only by way of a pseudonym. In addition to interview responses, you may be asked to provide documents such as lesson plans or units of study that demonstrate the embedding of career readiness skills in your curriculum.

I value you and your support. As a high school educator, your perspective and understanding of the new graduation mandates and how you incorporate career readiness skills into your classroom practices would be invaluable. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study. If you are willing to participate, please contact me at Bookrunner28@gmail.com.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Regina S. Lanham

Doctoral Candidate, Indiana University

Bookrunner28@gmail.com

812-639-9419

Appendix B:

Indiana University Informed Consent

INDIANA UNIVERSITY INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT FOR RESEARCH

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Scientists do research to answer important questions which might help change or improve the way we do things in the future.

This consent form will give you information about the study to help you decide whether you want to participate. Please read this form, and ask any questions you have, before agreeing to be in the study.

TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY IS VOLUNTARY

You may choose not to take part in the study or may choose to leave the study at any time. Deciding not to participate, or deciding to leave the study later, will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled and will not affect your relationship with River City Middle/High School.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' understanding of the new graduation mandates for career readiness skills and how these teachers incorporate career readiness skills into their

classroom practices along with the challenges they face in the process. The results from this study will provide baseline data from a rural school in Indiana regarding teacher understanding of these new graduation mandates surrounding career readiness

You were selected as a possible participant because you are a member of the RCMHS faculty.

The study is being conducted by Regina Sue Lanham, Indiana University School of Education.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THE STUDY?

If you agree to be in the study, you will do the following things:

- You will be asked to schedule and participate in an interview.
- The face-to-face interview will take place at the location of your choice and be recorded.
- You will be asked to provide documentation of career readiness skill development practices in classes you teach (i.e. course syllabus, student responsibilities/expectations, sample lesson plans etc.).
- Lastly, you will be asked to take part in a focus group discussion.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?

While participating in the study, the risks, side effects, and/or discomforts are minimal as the focus in on classroom practices related to career readiness. Additionally, the study will be in compliance with all federal and professional ethical standards. However, you may stop the study at any time.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?

We don't expect you to receive any benefit from taking part in this study, but we hope to learn things that will help educators in the future.

HOW WILL MY INFORMATION BE PROTECTED?

Efforts will be made to keep your personal information confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. No information which could identify you will be shared in publications about this study.

WHO SHOULD I CALL WITH QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?

For questions about the study, or in the event of an emergency, contact the researcher Reginal Sue Lanham, at 812-639-9419.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, to discuss problems, complaints, or concerns about a research study, or to obtain information or to offer input, please contact the IU Human Subjects Office at 800-696-2949 or at irb@iu.edu.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?

If you decide to participate in this study, you can change your mind and decide to leave the study at any time in the future. The study team will help you withdraw from the study safely. If you decide to withdraw, please contact Regina Sue Lanham.

PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT

In consideration of all of the above, I give my consent to participate in this research study. I will be given a copy of this informed consent document to keep for my records. I agree to take part in this study.

Participant's Printed Name:_____

Participant's Signature:_____**Date**:_____

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent:_____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent:_____**Date**:_____

Appendix C:

Document Review Protocol

Teacher Pseudonym: _____

Document Collected: _____

Source of Evidence:	**Elements or Content Related to Career Readiness Skills:**	**Notes:**
Teacher Unit/Lesson Plan		
Assignment Rubrics		

Appendix D:

One-to-one Interview Protocol and Potential Questions

Time of interview:

Date:

Location:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' understanding of the new graduation mandates for career readiness skills and how these teachers incorporate career readiness skills into their classroom practices along with the challenges they face in the process. The information gathered will be used to provide baseline data from a rural school in Indiana regarding teachers understanding of these new graduation mandates surrounding career readiness. The data can also be used to inform future practice and program development. I will be conduction one-on-one interviews with up to eleven school based faculty members. All participants in the study will be assigned a pseudonym and only I will know the name of the participant. I anticipate this interview lasting up to sixty minutes).

[Have the interviewee read and sign the consent form.]

[Turn on the recording device.]

Appendix E:

Question Protocol -- Conceptual Framework

Concept	Elements	Questions
Career Readiness Skills	Applied Knowledge: *Applied Academic Skills >>> what are these? Be more specific? Mathematics, literacy, science … *Critical Thinking Skills	1. Thinking back on your own personal experiences both as a student and now as a teacher, what skills did you acquire in school that you felt were most valuable for you as you entered the workforce? • How can you offer those same skills to your students? 2. What are some examples of the "academic" skills that students need to in order to be ready for the workplace? Let's break it down to subject areas for specific skills. • English/Language Arts and writing • Mathematics • Science/Social Studies 3. How do you integrate those academic skills into your classroom practices? Curriculum?

		• Share examples of a specific lessons you feel really bring together the student's academic skills with the skills they need for future employment. • What went well during the lessons? • What did not go so well? Create a discussion with the teacher around personal characteristics, and workplace skills students should acquire. Let the teacher know you will be documenting skills mentioned during the conversation. 4. How do you integrate those personal characteristics into your classroom practices? Curriculum? • Share examples of a specific lessons you feel really bring together the student's personal characteristics with the skills they need for future employment. • What went well during the lessons?
	Workplace Skills: *Resource Management *Information Use *Communication Skills	

	*System Thinking *Technology use Effective Relationships: *Personal Qualities *Interpersonal Skills Beliefs and Social Constraints	• What did not go so well? 5. How do you integrate those workplace skills into your classroom practices? Curriculum? • Share examples of a specific lessons you feel really brings together the workplace skills they learn in the classroom with the skills they need for future employment. • What went well during the lessons? • What did not go so well? 6. What have been some challenges of integrating these various types of skills into your classroom practices? Curriculum? Show teachers a copy of Indiana's Employability Skills Framework. As you can see, you already include many of these skills into your lessons and curriculum. Looking ahead how can this Framework add to the

		classroom experiences for your students as they explore on their future career options? 7. Describe some ways you can apply a couple of the characteristics listed on this poster in your classroom? Are there specific lessons or instructional techniques that come to mind when you see the poster? Please elaborate... Now let's move the conversation to the new graduation mandates. Create discussion with the teacher around the new graduation mandates specifically the "Learn and Demonstrate Employability Skills" section. "Employability Skills are demonstrated by ONE of the following: • Project-Based Learning Experience • Service-Based Learning Experience • Work-Based Learning Experience 8. How do these new mandates influence the way you prepare for and deliver instruction in your classroom?

		9. How do these new mandates affect students in this rural community? 10. What support and guidance will you need from district leaders to ensure you are prepared to offer students learning opportunities that will enable the students to demonstrate these skills? 11. How can we, as educators provide students with the skills they need to succeed after high school?

Deeper Learning Let's tie what is happening in the classroom to the workplace --	master of core academic content critical thinking and problem-solving effective communication ability to work collaboratively learning how to learn academic mindsets	1. Tell me about your classroom. How is your classroom arranged to optimize teaching? 2. What are your strategies for building effective classroom expectations? How do these expectations relate to the world outside of the school building? 3. What types of lesson plans do you create? 4. What is your favorite unit to teach? a. Can you describe the learning opportunities that take place during the unit? b. What types of lectures, do the students take part in? c. What type of independent activities do students take part in? d. What type of group/collaborative activities do students take part in?

		e. Describe the culminating activity for the unit? f. Do you utilize similar activities for other units? Can you give another example? 5. What do you hope students gain from the unit? 6. What are ways you can relate the content/lessons in your class to the real world? Please share a couple of examples. 7. In your class, how do you support students to embrace their knowledge and their learning for their future? 8. Describe ways educators can provide authentic learning experiences for students in a rural community? What opportunities do students have to see teachers in your building collaborating or working together? 9. What opportunities do student have in your classroom to engage with technology? Please share examples.

		10. What opportunities do you have as a teacher to break down the classroom walls to go global, especially in a rural community? 11. How do you reflect on your teaching? 12. How do students reflect on what they learn in your class? 13. As educators, how can we create a schools and classrooms that are as engaging, responsive, and dynamic as the world around us? 14. What kind of support or guidance have you received (from administration or district leaders) to expand your learning as an educator? 15. Are there areas of teaching that intrigue you to want to learn more? Please explain. Researcher will develop a discussion of deeper learning with teachers… "The deeper learning movement has been driven by the post-secondary and labor sectors

		that have not been satisfied with the capacities of incoming or potential employees…" How can we, as educators provide students with the skills they need to succeed after high school?
Teacher Role	*Teaching Background*	1. Tell me a little bit about your background. o Where did you grow up? What was it like growing up there?

		○ What was your family's educational level? – this is awkward but something like this. ○ What was your K-12 schooling experience like? ○ What kind of work opportunities were available to you growing up? ○ How did you think that your educational experiences prepared you for college? For work? ○ Why did you become a teacher? ○ What are your values or beliefs about the teaching profession? Have they changed over the years?
	Teaching Experience	• Describe your teaching experience and how you came to work at RCMHS. ○ Where did you start teaching? ○ What grade level(s) do you currently teach? ○ What subjects do you currently teach?

		○ What curriculum areas are you licensed to teach? ○ Have you always taught in a rural high school setting? If not, describe your previous teaching setting. ○ What do you enjoy about teaching? ○ What are some of the challenges you experience?
	Collective Background (How has work and life experiences influenced your role as a teacher)	• How have your life experiences influenced your role as a teacher? ○ How have your early teaching experiences influenced your work now? ○ What are the qualities and traits you have that enable you to be an effective teacher? • Which of these experiences do you believe has helped you to become a positive role model for the students you serve as they explore post-secondary opportunities?

		• What are the most exciting aspects of your work and teaching? • Who has given you the most support in learning to be an effective teacher? • On a daily basis, how and when do you prepare for the classes you teach? • What opportunities do student have to observe you during the time you are prepping for classes?

Appendix F:

Introductory E-mail for Focus Group Interview

Greetings Study Cite Educator,

I hope this message finds you well. My name is Sue Lanham. I am an administrator in this district at an elementary school campus. I am currently writing a dissertation as a requirement to earn a Doctorate in Educational Leadership at Indiana University Bloomington. The purpose of this message is to invite you to participate in the research study. This study seeks to explore high school teacher' understanding of the new graduation mandates and how they will incorporate career readiness skills into their classroom practices as well as describe the challenges faced when integrating these career readiness skills.

If you choose to participate, you will take part in a confidential 60-minute focus group interview. The focus group interview seeks to explore the groups experiences relative to career readiness, the new graduation mandates and classroom practices. While there is a common set of questions that will be asked to all participants, participants may be asked to clarify in order to expand the understanding of answers they have given. I will provide each participant with a copy of the transcription of the interviews to ensure that I've accurately captured the information relayed during the discussion.

With your permission, the focus group interview will be audio-taped and I will take notes of the conversation. The audio file will be transcribed verbatim to capture accurate record of the conversation. While the groups responses will inform the findings and conclusions of the study, your identity will be kept confidential. On transcripts, you will be identified only by way of a pseudonym. In addition to focus group responses, you may be asked to provide documents such

as lesson plans or units of study that demonstrate the embedding of career readiness skills in your curriculum.

I value you and your support. As a high school educator, your perspective and understanding of the new graduation mandates and how you incorporate career readiness skills into your classroom practices would be invaluable. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study. If you are willing to participate, please contact me at Bookrunner28@gmail.com.Thank you for your time. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Regina S. Lanham

Doctoral Candidate, Indiana University

Bookrunner28@gmail.com

812-639-9419

Appendix G:

Focus Group Protocol and Interview Questions

Time of interview:

Date:

Location:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

(Describe the project). The purpose of this qualitative research study, then is to explore the understanding and experiences of core-academic teachers in rural southern Indiana high school as they incorporate new graduation mandates including career readiness skills into their classroom practices to prepare students for the demands of future employment. The information gathered from this interview will be useful to inform future practice and program development. I will be conduction one focus group interview with up to six school based faculty members. All participants in the study will be assigned a pseudonym and only I will know the name of the participant. I anticipate this interview lasting up to sixty minutes).

[Have the interviewee read and sign the consent form.]

[Turn on the recording device.]

1. Let's take a look around the room at the collective experience of this group, let's take a moment to introduce ourselves and tell what you currently teach.

2. It will be important for everyone to feel free to speak freely. Please listen to the ideas of others with an open mind and be respectful of their opinions and feedback.

Begin the Discussion

1. Let's talk collectively about the goal of K-12 education. All teachers to brainstorm, discuss goals.
    a. How does this goal affect high school teachers and their classrooms?
2. Has the goal of K-12 education changed over the past 10 years? If so, how?
3. Have these changes affected the way we teach in our classrooms? Explain.
4. Are the classroom expectations the same in every classroom throughout the building? Explain.
5. How do teachers collaborate with each other to create assignments/projects that align with each other? Please share examples. What skills are students using to complete the assignment/project? Can you relate those skills to the world of work that students will someday face? Explain.

Share Indiana's Employability Skills Framework with the group to spark further discussion.

1. Do the components of this Framework effect the school organizes class offerings and/or curriculum? Discuss.
    a. If we break the conversation down to discuss each of the five areas as they relate to RCMHS.
        i. Mindsets

ii. Self-management Skills
iii. Learning Strategies
iv. Social Skills
v. Workplace Skills

b. How does RCMHS address they skills in each of these areas? Is this done collectively by the staff or individually in the classrooms based on what you teach? Explain.
i. Mindsets
ii. Self-management Skills
iii. Learning Strategies
iv. Social Skills
v. Workplace Skills

c. Which areas include skills that are assessed regularly? Explain.

2. In which of the five areas do you feel RCMHS students are most successful? Explain
3. In which of the five areas do you feel RCMHS students are least successful? Explain
4. What types of professional development have you received related to curriculum integration of these skills?
5. What types of professional development would you like to receive related to curriculum integration of these skills?

Now let's move the conversation to the new graduation mandates. Create discussion with the teachers as a group around the new graduation mandates specifically the "Learn and Demonstrate Employability Skills" section. "Employability Skills are demonstrated by ONE of the following:

- Project-Based Learning Experience
- Service-Based Learning Experience
- Work-Based Learning Experience

12. How did you find out about the new mandates?
13. How do these new mandates influence the way you prepare for and deliver instruction as a building?
14. How do the new mandates affect the climate and culture of the school?
15. How do these new mandates affect students who attend this rural community? What opportunities are available to them?
16. What support and guidance will you need from district leaders to ensure you are prepared to offer students learning opportunities that will enable the students to demonstrate the skills required by the new mandates?
17. How can we, as educators provide students with the skills they need to succeed after high school?

Appendix H:

Indiana's Employability Skills Framework

(Indiana Department of Workforce Development, 2017)

Appendix I:

Letter to Community

RIVER CITY HIGH SCHOOL

4171 Spring Street
River City, IN 47123
Phone (317) 123-1212 Fax (317) 345-6789

Andrew Jackson
Principal

August 13, 2018

Community Partners and Friends:

River City High School is off to another great start. This will be the third year of the Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) program, and we are excited in the success of the program. The Indiana Department of Education mandates that all schools develop a program to encourage students to make wise choices, be responsible, and show respect and pride in themselves, school, and community. Our program is titled, "**River City POWER.**"

With the strong community support in the past, **POWER** has encouraged the positives in **ALL** 460+ students, **schoolwide**. Students are encouraged to show pride in their school and themselves, ownership of the choices they make, and respect for others in school and in the community. Our staff looks for opportunities to reward these positive behaviors which are creating a respectful and inviting culture within our school. Last year's PBIS program brought pep rallies, special lunches, field days, and prize giveaways for our students.

River City High School needs your help to continue the success of this program! We would greatly appreciate any donations from your company or organization – monetary and/or merchandise such as gift cards or other items. This donation will be used to reinforce our PBIS program and serve as incentives for our students who demonstrate positive behavior in the school and community. Your donation is greatly appreciated and will be used to continue the success of our **River City POWER** Program. We thank you in advance for your support.

To send a donation, please make checks payable to RCHS and mail to:

RCHS
PBIS Committee
4171 Spring Street
River City, IN 47123

If you would like us to pick up an item donation, we would be more than happy to do that as well. Just let us know what time is best for you! You can contact Brandon Johnson, Principal, at 317-123-1212.

Once again, thank you in advance for your support in our youth! It is because of you we can offer these programs to our students! Looking forward to seeing you at every RCHS event this year.

Sincerely,

The PBIS Committee at RCHS

Appendix J

PBIS Matrix

modified05/2016

	PRIDE	OWNERSHIP	WISE CHOICES	EXCELLENCE	RESPECT
Personal Behavior	• Be a Leader • Help others • Be your best self & utilize self-control • Dress appropriately & use proper hygiene	• Be on time • Report problems to a staff member immediately • Ask questions when help is needed • Be willing to learn • Be positive!	• Keep hands, feet, and objects to self • Be Tobacco, Drug and Alcohol Free • Be in the appropriate area at the appropriate time • Follow emergency procedures	• Grow toward your greatness • Attend school everyday • Overcome adversity • Set goals • Go above and beyond • Be a role model	• Treat others with kindness, compassion, and respect • Use appropriate language and voice tone • Respect & accept differences
Class Settings	• Have a positive attitude • Use time wisely & remain on task	• Bring everything needed for class • Keep room clean • Ask questions when help is needed	• Keep hands, feet, and objects to self • Cooperate with staff the first time • Use Active Listening Skills • Follow class procedures • Participate in academic discussions	• Strive to grow towards greatness • Be engaged • Use time wisely	• Treat others with kindness, compassion, and respect • Use appropriate language and voice tone • Use relevant and focused questions, responses, & comments
Hallwa	• Help resolve conflicts • Follow school procedures	• Keep hallway clean • Always have a pass and go to	• Walk safely at an appropriate pace • Keep hands, feet, and objects to self	• Use time wisely • Walk on the right • Use most direct route	• Treat others with kindness, compassion, and respect • Use appropriate language and voice tone

Appendix K

Calendar of PBIS Events

AUGUST

August 6th – RESPECT the Building

Targeted Behavior: Keeping your building & surroundings clean: Picking up trash

Reward: 5 Bucks to spend 5th period in gym/courtyard on Friday

August 13th – OWN(ership) your Academics

Targeted Behavior: Turning in assignments on time or ahead (2)

Reward: 5 Bucks to spend 5th period at track (gym due to rain) on Friday

August 20th – (Wise) CHO(ices)choosing to Be Punctual

Targeted Behavior: On time to class; teacher choose one day that week to reward each person in class that day

Reward: Drawings -- will not have 5th period due to a convocation Friday

August 27th – Be an EXCELLEN(ce)t, Active Participant in Class

Targeted Behavior: Volunteer to answer/participate in class

Reward: 5 Bucks to spend 5th period at track on Friday

SEPTEMBER

September 4th -- It is EXCELLEN(ce)t to Support your Peers or Participate in Extracurriculars

Targeted Behavior: Attend or Participate in any extracurricular events (card with signature) -- Friday they get POWER Bucks for the number of events attended so far

- Tuesday, September 4th -- Isaac at Tennis
- Wednesday, September 5th -- Robyn at Tennis
- Thursday, September 6th -- ??? at Volleyball
- Friday, September 7th -- Brandon at Football
- Saturday, September 8th -- ??? at Volleyball

Reward #1 (Friday) : 5 POWER Bucks to play board or card games in Library

Reward #2 (Monday): Choose one Gas Card or Amazon Card (using signed card with at least three event signatures)

September 10th -- Take PRIDE in your Appearance

Targeted Behavior: Dress Up Week (1 per day)

Reward: Wear a Hat for 5 POWER Bucks

Sept 17th belongs to Student Council due to Homecoming

September 24th – Make a WISE CHOICE to be Present

Targeted Behavior: Perfect Attendance on Tues-Fri of that week

Reward: On Friday, 4 POWER Bucks for 4 days of perfect attendance

- Mr. Johnson will come around to sell popsicles for 4 POWER Bucks

OCTOBER

October 1st -- OWN(ership) your Behavior toward Others

MONDAY MUST BE A LESSON **BULLYING LESSON**

Regina S. Lanham

Email: bookrunner28@gmail.com

Professional Summary

Passionate visionary leader with a strong commitment to student achievement and excellence plus proven ability to establish and nurture strong working relationships with members of the school community necessary to promote a stimulating, safe, and motivating learning environment for students.

Areas of Expertise

Teaching	Budget Management	Leadership and teambuilding
Grant management	Curriculum development	Analyze research and data to drive instruction
Fundraising	Coordinate professional development	Technology one-to-one innovation and initiative

Professional Experience

Principal, grades PreK – 6, Heth-Washington Elementary School, Central, IN

July 2017 to present

- Contributed to the academic and social tone of the school through the consistent demonstration of professionalism and enthusiasm of the school community.
- Upheld a commitment to academic excellence by establishing and promoting an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust.
- Collaborate with district leadership team to address district issues and goals promoting creativity and career development to all staff district wide as outlined in the AdvancED Accreditation Report.
- Partnered with the curriculum director implement social/emotional curriculum and instructional strategies to use in the classroom and cultivate a positive learning environment for elementary school staff, students, and families
- Led professional development experiences with teachers breaking down student data to implement remediation and enrichment experiences for student

Principal, grades 6-8, Assistant Principal grades 6-12, Athletic Director, eLearning Coach, School Librarian, 6-12, **Jan. 2012-to June 2017 South Central Jr./Sr. High School Elizabeth, IN**

- Contributed to the academic and social tone of the school through the consistent demonstration of professionalism and enthusiasm of the school community.

- Upheld a commitment to academic excellence by establishing and promoting an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust.
- Collaborate with district leadership team to address district issues and goals promoting creativity and career development to all staff district wide as outlined in the AdvancED Accreditation Report.
- Partnered with the curriculum director and outside contractor to design and implement a one-to-one iPad initiative in the elementary schools (distributing 800 iPads).
- Worked collaboratively with district level staff to create a school within a school model by developing South Central Middle School.
- Cultivated a positive learning environment for middle school staff and students by implementing a 212 Degree positive intervention program.
- Led professional development experiences with teachers breaking down student data to implement remediation and enrichment experiences for students
- Develop transition program based on research for students moving from elementary to junior high school and middle school to high school.
- Use a wide variety of teaching aids of various formats (print, web, multimedia), motivational techniques, and implementation strategies to coordinate, teach, and evaluate school and classroom culture that engages both students and staff in active learning.
- Coach- Varsity Cross Country (2013-2015), Jr. High Student Council (2013-2015), Harrison County Renaissance Coordinator (2013- current), IHSAA Leadership Coordinator

District Librarian, K-12, Aug. 2004-to 2011 Shoals Community School Corporation, Shoals, IN

- Use a wide variety of teaching aids of various formats (print, web, multimedia), motivational techniques, and implementation strategies to coordinate, teach, and evaluate information literacy sessions that engages both students and staff in active learning.
- Implement collaborative units with teachers in order to integrate research and information-seeking technology endeavors.
- Research, demonstrate, and implement online search tools and available software into classroom curriculum district wide (INSPIRE, Google, Yahoo, Evergreen, KidsClick, THOMAS, WorldCat, Library of Congress, IU Library database).
- Develop information-seeking curriculum, instruction, and collection development for two school media centers servicing students in grades K-12.
- Coach- Varsity Cross Country (2008-current), Varsity Girls Track(2011- current), Junior High Academic (2004 - present), Girls Varsity Softball (2004-2009), Pep Club (2009-2011).

Librarian, Classroom Teacher, and Special Education K-5, Aug. 1994 - 2004

Vineland Elementary School, Rotonda West, FL

- Designed and taught lessons to students with various exceptionalities (Educable Mentally Handicapped, Trainable Mentally Handicapped, Specific Learning Disabled, and Emotionally Handicapped) in all curriculum areas and life skill areas according to the Sunshine State Standards and Individual Education Plans.
- Facilitated presentations and recommended readings for teaching professionals on strategies that effectively facilitate learning for students with Special Needs.
- Employed a wide-range of techniques to promote active learning including guided reading, problem solving strategies, social skills along with life skills activities, and individualized instruction.

- Created innovative, high-quality lessons in order to focus students' attention on the content which kept students engaged in the learning process.

Education

2020 Doctorate of Educational in Educational Leadership,
IU Bloomington School of Education

2017 Superintendent Licensure IU Bloomington; Master's Degree in Strategic Mgmt.
IU Kelley School of Business

2013 Educational Leadership Licensing
Indiana University Southeast

2001 Master's Degree in Library Media
NOVA Southeastern University

1990 Bachelor of Arts in Education
College of Mount Saint Joseph

Conference Presentations/Professional Development Presentations

- Dyslexia, Multisensory Training, SHCSC, 2018-19
- Chromebook Applications, 2016-2017
- Pad Apps for Educators, SHCSC, 2015 (ongoing)
- Using ThingLink, SHCSC, 2015
- Google Apps, SHCSC, 2014-2015 (ongoing)
- Developing Classroom Web-Page, SHCSC, 2015
- Digital Literacy for Students, SHCSC, 2014 – 2015 (repeated)
- Technology and Media Networking Workshop, SIEC, 2014
- Technology in the Classroom, South Central Jr./Sr. High School 2014
- Library Technology, (SIEC workshop) Southridge High School, 2014
- Transition Programs that Work, South Harrison Community Schools, 2013
- Collaboration that Works, South Harrison Community Schools, 2012
- Using Animoto, Glogster, Wordle, and Prezi, Indiana University-Southeast Writing Project Conference, 2011
- Plagiarism in Education, Shoals Community Schools (2011)
- Using INSPIRE, Library of Congress and Cicero, Shoals Community Schools, 2011
- Creating movies using FLIP cameras and iMovie, Shoals Community Schools, 2011